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# **Doctoral education in the Humanities: Research training pedagogies in the UK**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The Open University

2007

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Fiction and facts on humanities doctoral research

The postgraduate sherry party was a regular feature of the first term of the academic year, designed to introduce students to staff and to each other. For many it was hail and farewell, since the Department did not have the resources to mount a proper graduate programme, and in any case espoused the traditional belief that research was a lonely and eremitic occupation, a test of character rather than learning, which might be vitiated by excessive human contact. As if they sensed this the new postgraduates, particularly those from overseas, roamed the floor eagerly accosting the senior guests, resolved to cram a whole year's sociability into one brief evening.

David Lodge (1965) *The British Museum is Falling Down*, London: Penguin, p. 117

The scene above may be penned for maximum comic effect; however, it is representative of conceptualisations of PhD research in the Humanities, not only at the time at which David Lodge was writing his novel, but also closer to the present day. Linda Nordling writes in the opening paragraph of her Open House article in Education Guardian:

Think a postgraduate qualification in arts and humanities research is lonely work? Think again. The Arts and Humanities Research Council is celebrating coming into its own this month with schemes to banish the image of the “lone scholar” to the dustbin of history. (Nordling, 2005, p. 70)

The initiative is laudable, yet the implication behind Nordling's statement is that the image of the humanities doctoral student as a “lone scholar” was very much in circulation in 2005.

The “lone scholar” image is a controversial one. Pearson (2002) distinguishes between loneliness and isolation in humanities doctoral research. While both are viewed as integral to the experience of a humanities PhD student, isolation, he notes, lies at the foundation of what knowledge-making is about in the Humanities (Delamont and Eggleston, 1981). PhD certification in the Humanities is awarded to students who become experts on particular topics, chosen by themselves rather than assigned by the supervisors.

Loneliness, on the other hand, refers to the social rather than intellectual aspects of doctoral research. “The institutional drive towards more explicit doctoral socialisation is making it more difficult for a student to be neglected in a way that results in social isolation,” writes Pearson (2002, p. 88), echoing the ethos of research training policies. There is a fine line here between the loneliness resulting from the lack of an academic network and that arising from an insufficiently developed everyday support network. It is “academic” loneliness that appears to be targeted by current research training policies.

Discussion of the image of the “lone scholar” and isolation/loneliness in doctoral research is inextricably linked with ideas of autonomy and independence. Johnson *et al.* (2000) unpack the concepts of “autonomy” and “the independent scholar” that underpin postgraduate pedagogy in the context of the supervisory relationship. Doctoral supervisors, they note, adopt a range of approaches, from a “pedagogy of indifference” or of “icy, magisterial disdain” (Riemer, 1998), through viewing doctoral students as “always-already independent”, to an “invisible pedagogy” (Bernstein, 1977) which aims to contribute to the individual development of doctoral students. These approaches, promoting the creation of an “autonomous scholar”, exist in parallel to initiatives to offer formal research training courses to doctoral students, initiatives which “do not appear to have challenged in any fundamental way the deep attachment that persists among humanities and social sciences scholars, at least, to the supervisory relationship as being central to the pedagogy of the PhD” (Johnson *et al.*, 2000, p. 137). However, the shift in knowledge production practices brings with it a requirement to review the existing image of the scholar that underpins doctoral education and to foreground the development of “sensitivities to the concerns of others, a willingness to work with others, and a capacity to reason or make judgements on the basis of contextual information rather than relying purely on abstract, universalising principles” (p. 146). Johnson *et al.* go on to emphasize that “in the teaching of these skills to PhD students, new forms of pedagogy would need to emerge and the primacy of the supervisory relationship be reviewed” (p. 146).

The relationship between formal research training (put forward by the research councils as a new form of pedagogy) and disciplinary enculturation is also problematised by Mills (2006), in a recent conference paper on anthropology PhD students:

the Research Councils’ discourse of training and professional skill development sits uneasily with disciplinary models of scholarly



apprenticeship that still tacitly inform approaches to training, reproduction, stewardship, and creativity, especially in the Humanities and the social sciences.

He points out that

For students within the most elite departments, an overly rigid approach to training and professional ‘skills’ sits defiantly at odds with a scholarly discourse focused on advancing disciplinary debates. The rhetoric of ‘training’ espoused by the ESRC is subverted, reinterpreted, or tolerated by being distanced from disciplinary concerns.<sup>2</sup>

The tension between formal training and disciplinary apprenticeship arises partly due to the degree of emphasis one places on the need to accumulate transferable skills as opposed to creating disciplinary knowledge; in other words, to the way in which PhD research is conceptualised, as a *magnum opus* (Park, 2005a) or, conversely, as research training. The other element that fuels the tension is the view of learning that accompanies conceptions of the nature of the PhD. Peer learning is not an approach that sits comfortably with the way in which humanities PhD research is currently perceived by the majority of students and academics. Peer learning in cross-disciplinary training environments is even further down the list on these students’ and academics’ agendas. Yet, as I discuss in this thesis, peer learning in cross-disciplinary environments appears to be what is provided by a number of universities as a compromise between the research councils’ generic/transferable skills rhetoric and discipline academics’ supervision practices. In Fig. 1, based on the literature and policy documents examined as part of this research (discussed in **Chapters 1-3**), I have represented the various opportunities humanities doctoral students have to learn how to carry out research: decontextualised skills training (which is formal and generic), cross-disciplinary training for groups of students from humanities disciplines (which aims to achieve a balance between formal and informal training, as well as between generic and discipline-specific provision), research seminars (which bring together students and academics from the same discipline in informal learning settings) and supervision (the humanities model for this tends to take the form of dialogue rather than formal teaching).

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<sup>2</sup> With particular reference to writing, Mills notes that: “Those who now work in academia often called for better advice on writing and publication strategies, grant-writing and careers in general.”



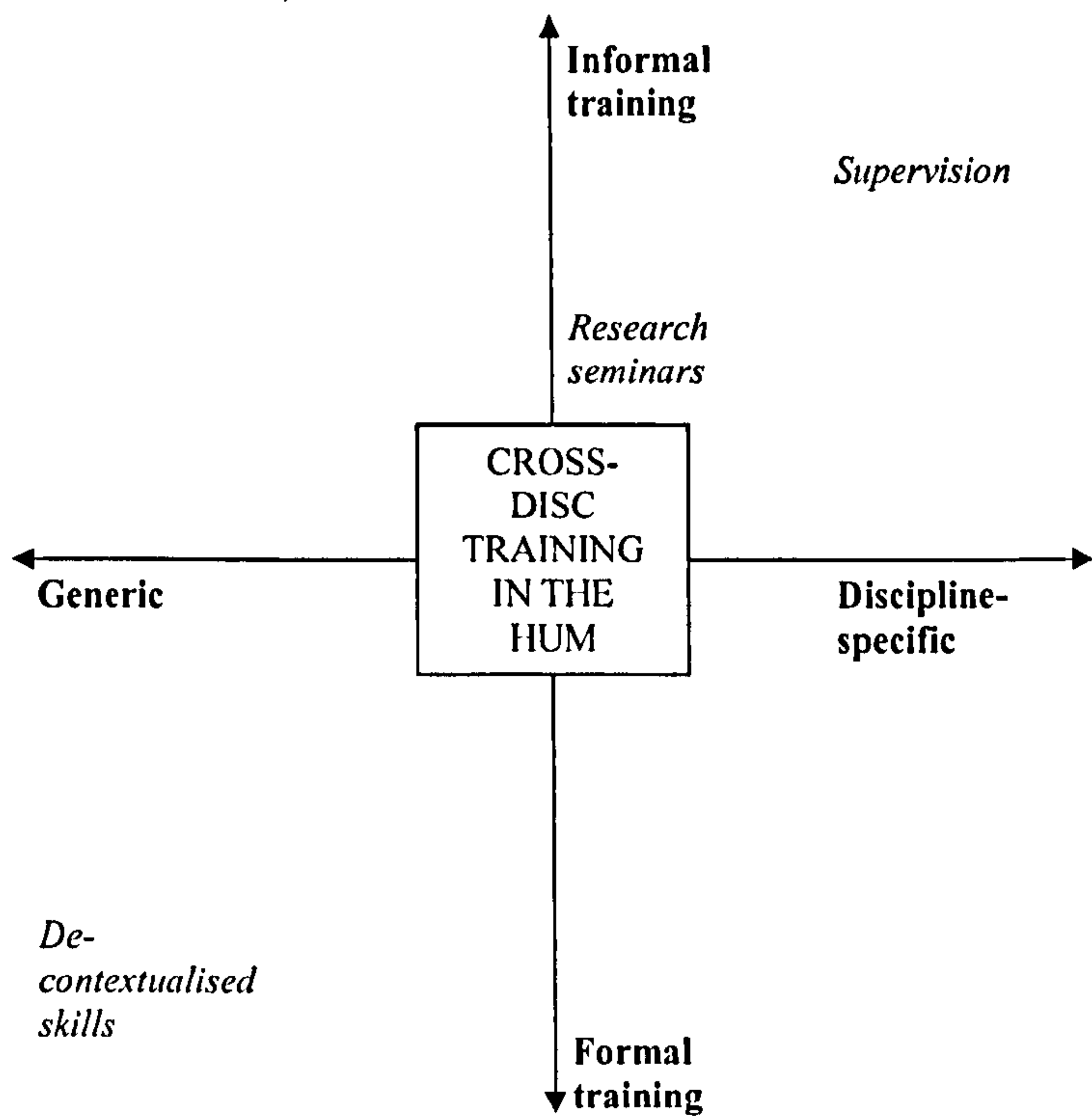


Figure 1: Opportunities for learning how to carry out doctoral research in the Humanities

The label “cross-disciplinary” is used throughout this thesis to refer to situations in which research training is provided for groups of students coming from two or more disciplines. “Cross-disciplinary” is seen here as the more suitable term, given that “multidisciplinary” and “interdisciplinary” carry with them strong assumptions about the degree of integration of disciplinary approaches. “Cross-disciplinary” is preferred as the neutral term (although see the definitions provided in Salter and Hearne, 1996, and Lattuca, 2001).

1.2 Formal research training courses for doctoral students in the UK: The policy context

Doctoral education in UK higher education institutions relies on three forms of learning about research: discipline-specific apprenticeship to a supervisor; informal, discipline-specific opportunities for learning from peers (research seminars); and formal training

courses. The third option, on which the present research focused, does not involve subject-matter coursework (as it would in the US system).

Becher (1993), reporting on research carried out in the early 1990s, shows how opportunities for learning how to do research differ across the disciplines. Becher compared doctoral education in Physics, Economics and History in a selection of what would now be labeled pre-1992 universities. Given the focus of my research on humanities students, I will limit the discussion of Becher's research to his findings on History doctorates. In a limited number of cases, Becher notes, prominent academics attract a large number of students who work on topics within the same area, forming a "research stable" (p. 128). Formal training in History doctoral education, he adds, is concentrated in the early stages of research. The degree of formalization of research training, as Becher suggests, appears to depend on economies of scale. Thus, it is unlikely that discipline-specific training would be an option available to all institutions. Arguably, the existence of "research stables" makes discipline-specific graduate seminars and workshops a viable alternative to generic formal training. Outside contexts in which a critical mass of students from the same discipline exists, lack of access to academic networks appears to be a common experience for doctoral students, and impacts negatively on the doctoral experience, all the more so when the supervision relationship suffers from a lack of structure.

Formal training for doctoral students in the UK is controlled by the Research Councils. Delamont *et al.* (2000), drawing on interviews with students and supervisors in a selection of disciplines from the natural and social sciences, note that the ESRC, the funding body behind their study, although not the most powerful funder of doctoral research in the UK, "exert[s] a disproportionate influence over postgraduate training" (p. 188). In 1991, the ESRC issued training guidelines (revised in 1996), divided into generic and subject-specific requirements, with which departments had to comply in order to receive ESRC recognition and doctoral studentships. Formal teaching about research in the first year of doctoral study thus became compulsory. The guidelines for research training were reworked in 2001, when the UK Research Councils and the then-AHRB issued a Joint Statement on Skills Training Requirements (see Appendix 1a). Subsequently, the AHRC adapted the requirements and designed its own framework of research training (AHRC, 2006a, see Appendix 1b). Delamont *et al.* (2000) note that "most policy statements and interventions in higher education have been insensitive to differences in disciplinary cultures" (p. 192) and that decontextualised research skills rather than subject-specific

knowledge are at the forefront of training agendas. The division between generic and subject-specific skills found its way into the AHRC's framework of research training requirements. Notwithstanding the attention that the policy documents pay to subject-specific training, it appears, from the few existing studies on humanities doctoral students in the UK (see **Chapter 2**), that Delamont *et al.*'s concern about the mismatch between knowledge-construction practices in the disciplines and the prescriptive guidelines on research training remains valid (see, for example, UKCGE, 2000).

The tension between, on the one hand, the teaching of decontextualised research skills in structured courses and, on the other, informal, discipline-specific apprenticeship underpins current approaches to and uptake of learning how to carry out research at an advanced level:

the result is that while there is widespread agreement - particularly among institutional managers - about the need for, and the generic purposes of, doctoral research training, there is also widespread unease and scepticism - particularly among students and their supervisors - about the value of what is being provided. (UKCGE, 2000, p. 15)

The AHRC argues that its needs-based model successfully addresses the tension between generic and subject-specific provision (AHRC, 2006a). **Chapter 6** in this thesis explores one instance in which the needs-based model was applied to practice and the uptake of opportunities for learning how to do research.

### 1.3 The overarching research question

The present thesis focuses on humanities PhD students and is concerned with formal research training programmes (outside the supervision relationship), organised by graduate schools in universities across the UK. Before outlining the research question, aims and objectives, a terminological preamble is required. "Humanities" designates a cluster of disciplines (history and its cognates, philosophy, theology, religious and divinity studies, English, classical and modern languages and literatures, linguistics, cultural and area studies, communication, media studies)<sup>3</sup> and, in the context of this research, it operates as a descriptive label rather than a bounding definition. It is inclusive of cultural geography, archaeology, anthropology, politics and international relations, wherever these departments

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<sup>3</sup> The research does not incorporate areas which have a performance aspect (drama, dance, music).

are incorporated within the Faculty of Humanities.<sup>4</sup> The research training provision that this thesis investigates accompanies traditional, library-based PhD programmes, and not New Route PhD, PhD by published work, practice-based or higher doctorates.

By focusing on humanities doctoral students, this thesis aims to contribute to redressing the current lack of research in this area, as compared to research on the doctoral experience in the natural and social sciences. The driving force behind the research is the concern, expressed in existing studies, that research training for humanities students rarely meets the needs of the target audience. Details of these studies are provided in **Chapters 2 and 3**.

In most UK universities, first-year PhD students in humanities disciplines are offered “research skills/methods” sessions (either as discrete units or as part of a coherent course), which aim to familiarise the students with the practice of research and to offer support for the registration process. Registration usually consists of submitting a written research proposal,<sup>5</sup> approximately six months into the first year, and orally defending the proposal in front of a committee of (usually) three academics. Research training provision is, in the majority of cases, not discipline-specific and differs depending on the extent to which it takes a view of skills/methods as generic and transferable. In some universities, institution-wide training provision is available. Other higher education institutions opt for less centralised provision: PhD students from humanities disciplines are grouped together (training may also be delivered jointly to humanities and social sciences students). The staples of doctoral research training are sessions on theory, epistemology, methodology, interdisciplinarity, locating and evaluating sources, and writing, but, as would be expected, there is considerable variation in delivery.

What is prefigured in faculty-wide cross-disciplinary training for humanities students is a learning community embarking on a journey to unpack the meaning of doctorateness in the Humanities and to learn how to do doctoral research, both in terms of producing knowledge and in terms of meeting institutional requirements to do with certification and progression. The pedagogic implications of creating a learning community in a cross-

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<sup>4</sup> The Arts and Humanities Research Council indicates on its website that “[n]o precise definition of the subject domain of the arts and humanities is possible and the Board is liberal in its interpretation of its domain. Subjects and disciplines are continually evolving, and there are inevitable overlaps and boundaries that the Board shares with other award-making bodies, especially the Research Councils.” ([www.ahrc.ac.uk](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk)).

<sup>5</sup> Length varies from university to university.



disciplinary setting were a key interest driving the present research and are returned to in **Chapter 8**.

Training provision is organised in response to the UK Research Councils' Joint Statement (RCUK (2001), see Appendix 1a in this thesis) and focuses on a variety of aspects of the doctoral experience. For the purpose of this research, two categories of the Joint Statement have been selected, A (Research Skills and Techniques), which relates to the intellectual content of the thesis, and E (Communication Skills), in particular thesis writing. The overarching question for this research is:

*How do official/formal research training cultures (outside the supervision relationship) contribute to supporting knowledge-making and writing practices in humanities doctoral research?*

Knowledge-making and writing are the two aspects of research training that most immediately resonate with the humanities model of scholarly apprenticeship and enculturation into the discipline, and which would be viewed as the domain of the supervisory relationship. This thesis explores the tensions surrounding research training in cross-disciplinary settings and aims to formulate pedagogic principles for research training course design.

#### **1.4 Research design: A preview**

The present thesis explores how current policy initiatives focusing on doctoral students (the Joint Skills Statement and the AHRC guidelines) were interpreted and applied in practice at one particular institution. Two perspectives were sought: that of the institution and its representatives, and that of the students. The underlying reason for seeking a dual perspective was not to contrast the views but to obtain as rich a description as possible of a teaching and learning situation. The research drew on two complementary methodologies: theory-building case study and constructivist grounded theorizing. The defining features of these approaches are flexibility in research design on the basis of evolving theory, and constant interplay between data collection and analysis. A detailed discussion of methodological choices in this thesis is available in **Chapter 5**. Table 1 in this chapter offers a synopsis of the components of the research.

In parallel to reviewing the literature for this project (see **Chapters 3 and 4**), I examined the research training handbooks from 10 universities across England, in order to ascertain whether there were clearly identifiable patterns in formal training provision for humanities doctoral students (*Research component 1*). The information in the research training handbooks helped me formulate criteria for the selection of the case study setting (*Research component 3*). Given the emphasis, in the educational research studies reviewed in **Chapter 4**, on writing as an integral part of knowledge-making in academic research, I opted to examine a series of “how to” guides as a distinct component of the research in order to ascertain how experienced writing developers view the place of writing in humanities research, and what the process of learning how to write entails in their view (*Research component 2*).

The case study observed as part of the research – a year-long research training programme for humanities doctoral students – yielded a generous range of data on peer learning in cross-disciplinary environments; however, support for writing in this training programme did not appear to reflect the variety of types of writing interventions documented in the research literature or recommended in the “how to” guides. Consequently, an additional component was inserted into the research, entailing observation of six one-off writing support sessions (*Research component 4*). These “snapshots” captured the two aspects of doctoral writing covered by support provision: thesis writing and writing for publication. The conceptualisation of writing which the “how to” guides overtly or implicitly promoted informed the analysis of writing-related data from the case study and the “snapshots” and served as a basis for the formulation of pedagogic principles in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The data components listed in Table 1 and the literature reviewed for the present project were divided, in order to give data collection and analysis coherence, into two major strands: “postgraduate research pedagogy” and “doctoral writing pedagogy”. Visual representations of these strands are available in **Chapter 5** (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).

### **1.5 Keywords**

This thesis takes a socio-cultural view of learning in cross-disciplinary environments. Four key concepts which inform the discussion throughout the thesis are detailed below:

- disciplines and disciplinarity

- disciplines as discourse communities
- learning in “communities of practice”
- pedagogy.

Table 1: Research design preview

| RESEARCH COMPONENT   | METHOD  | AIMS  | CHAPTER IN THESIS |
|--|---|---|-------------------|
| <i>Research component 1</i><br>Pre-fieldwork document analysis, <i>Set 1</i> | Content analysis of research training handbooks and related material from 10 universities across the UK | To identify patterns of research training provision for humanities PhD students (backdrop for the main component of the fieldwork)  | <b>Chapter 2</b>  |
| <i>Research component 2</i><br>Pre-fieldwork document analysis, <i>Set 2</i> | Content analysis of “how to” guides on producing doctoral theses  | To outline what guides highlight as important for PhD students to be aware of when writing a PhD thesis in order to identify the pedagogic underpinnings of advice on writing                 | <b>Chapter 7</b>  |
| <i>Research component 3</i><br>Fieldwork case study (main component)         | A case study of a year-long research training course for humanities PhD students                        | To look at conceptualisations of training as they unfold in the education process and to capture peer learning in progress in cross-disciplinary environments                                 | <b>Chapter 6</b>  |
| <i>Research component 4</i><br>Fieldwork snapshots                           | Observation data from six writing support sessions outside the case study                               | To examine the place of writing in research training and to formulate conclusions about the way in which writing is best supported in doctoral training, outside the supervisory relationship | <b>Chapter 7</b>  |

### 1.5.1 Disciplines and disciplinarity

In section 1.3 in this chapter I indicated the disciplines which are grouped in this research under the label “Humanities.” Here, I offer the definition of disciplinarity which underpinned the design of the research on which this thesis reports. “Disciplines”, according to Hirst (1965, pp. 128-129), each have their own peculiar concepts, which they integrate within a logical “network of possible relationships in which experience can be understood.” They also entail certain types of expression or statement that may be tested against experience in a direct or indirect way, and have specific “techniques and skills for exploring experience”.

Whereas Hirst sees disciplines purely as knowledge divisions, Augsburg (2005, p. 119), following Perkins and Salomon (1988), lists the following elements of a discipline, which encompass both epistemological and social aspects: basic concepts, modes of inquiry



(or research methods), what counts as a problem, observational categories, representational techniques, types of explanation, standards of proof, general ideals of what constitutes the discipline, assumptions and worldviews, disciplinary perspective, seminal texts/books, major thinkers, major practitioners, professional academic associations, leading academic journals.

Becher and Trowler (2001) take a similar view, noting that “contextual factors can be a powerful means of moderating the impact of epistemology and epistemologically-related structural factors” (p. 27). Becher and Trowler place humanities disciplines in the soft-pure category and describe the nature of knowledge in the Humanities as follows:

Reiterative; holistic (organic/river-like); concerned with particulars, qualities, complication; personal, value-laden; dispute over criteria for knowledge verification and obsolescence; lack of consensus over significant questions to address; results in understanding/interpretation. (p. 36, see also Appendix 1c in this thesis)

It is important to locate this description in the context of Becher and Trowler’s definition of discipline as encompassing not only the subject matter (“the epistemological properties of knowledge forms”, p. 24) but also the social dimensions of the academic community engaging with a particular form of knowledge. “Dispute over criteria for knowledge verification and obsolescence” (Becher and Trowler, 2001, p. 36) brings to the foreground the interaction among members of different humanities disciplinary communities, with various levels of expertise.

Viewing disciplines as living bodies rather than as static repositories of knowledge has important implications for research training. Acknowledging knowledge-making as a process that takes place not only through individual research in libraries but also through conversations with others is an important premise for designing learning opportunities which support knowledge-making at the level of process and which model or offer a rehearsal of disciplinary conversations. **Chapter 6** in this thesis explores the formal learning opportunities offered to a cross-disciplinary group of humanities doctoral students in a UK university.



### 1.5.2 Disciplines as discourse communities

“Discourse community” is a controversial construct in research on academic writing. Swales (1998) distinguishes between place discourse communities (local groups with expressed discursive goals) and focus discourse communities (dispersed groups brought together by a set of shared discursive practices). Earlier studies, notes Prior (2003), contribute a range of features of discourse communities to the debate, blurring the boundaries of the construct and complicating its uptake by researchers. Prior describes the trajectory of the concept as follows:

If initial community theories tended to imagine homogeneous discourses in homogeneous spaces, accounts of communities in the last decade have moved to acknowledge more heterogeneous, though still discrete discursive spaces, allowing for various conflicts, divisions of labor, and interactions with other discourses, but typically still involving homogeneous discourses (perhaps smaller and less stable than in earlier representations). (p. 12)

He argues that the use of the concept “discourse communities” must be accompanied by an understanding of the conceptions of the social which underpin it. This understanding would enable researchers to do full justice to the complexity of discourse communities as “spaces shot through with multiple discourses, practices and identities” (p. 6). This thesis acknowledges the multiplicity of discourses, practices and identities characteristic of the doctoral experience as well as its situatedness. Of the discourse communities in which doctoral students can claim membership, two were taken into account in the research on which this thesis reports: the discourse community of the students’ home discipline (a focus community, according to Swales, 1998) and a place discourse community, that of doctoral writers participating in the formal writing support sessions available in a university (outside the supervision relationship, not discipline-specific). The parameters of the latter are discussed in detail in this thesis in **Chapter 7**.

### 1.5.3 Learning in “communities of practice”

A third key assumption underpinning the research consisted of viewing doctoral study as a form of participation in various communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Barton and Tusting (2005) summarise the three aspects of the “communities of practice” theory (mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire) as follows:

Firstly, members interact with each other in many ways, which Wenger refers to as *mutual engagement*. Secondly, they will have a common endeavour, which is referred to as *joint enterprise*. Thirdly, they develop a *shared repertoire* of common resources of language, styles and routines by means of which they express their identities as members of the group. *Situated learning* then means engagement in a community of practice, and *participation* in communities of practice becomes the fundamental process of learning. (p. 2)

The benefits of the “communities of practice” theory, according to Barton and Tusting, are as follows:

It appears to resolve some pervasive concerns of social sciences about learning. It presents a theory of learning which acknowledges networks and groups which are informal and not the same as formal structures. It allows for groups which are distributed in some way and not in face-to-face contact. The overall apparatus of situated learning is a significant rethink of learning theory of value to anyone wanting to take learning beyond the individual. It is attractive as a middle-level theory between structure and agency which is applicable to and close to actual life and which resonates with detailed ethnographic accounts of how learning happens. It has proved useful as a theory and has been of value in practice. (p. 3)

Lea (2005) argues in favour of reclaiming “communities of practice” as a heuristic rather than as a top-down educational model. She notes a shift, in the communities of practice literature, from viewing communities of practice as settings in which learning occurs informally through participation in practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to using this concept as a justification in educational design, for the top-down, artificial creation of learning communities (Wenger, 1998). While Lea acknowledges that “Wenger (1998) does move the notion of educational design away from the reification of knowledge and the teaching of skills and information towards the negotiation of meaning” (p. 185), she points out that a fuller account of the process of meaning negotiation is required, one which takes into account the broader institutional context in which learning is situated. This thesis aims to inform educational design initiatives which interpret the Joint Skills Statement (RCUK, 2001) and bases its recommendations (in the final chapter in this thesis) on the analysis of how meaning is negotiated by participants in a research training community at a specific institution (Chapter 6).

Viewing the doctoral research experience through a “communities of practice” perspective, it can be said that doctoral students have membership of two communities: their home discipline and the cross-disciplinary research training community.<sup>6</sup> Neither the discipline nor the training community are “self-contained entities. They develop in larger contexts – historical, social, cultural, institutional – with specific resources and constraints” (Wenger, 1998, p. 79). Multiple membership and multiple levels of involvement in the communities are negotiated by the participants, who create connections among them (what Wenger refers to as “the careful weaving of the nexus of multimembership”, p. 161). The extent of participation in either community is partly controlled by institutional constraints, partly by individual involvement. In communities of practice, Wenger points out, “learning involves more than appropriating new pieces of information. Learners must often deal with conflicting forms of individuality and competence as defined in different communities.” (p. 160).

Doctoral students engage in research and research training activities; their level of engagement impacts on their status, which gradually shifts from that of a novice researcher to that of a full member of a discipline. Participation in the training community is finite and is subordinated to participation in the disciplinary community. The research on which this thesis reports investigated the knowledge-making and writing practices associated with research in the Humanities, as defined by discipline communities and supported by training communities.

#### 1.5.4 Pedagogy

A fundamental keyword underlying the research on which the present thesis reports is that of pedagogy. Pedagogy is understood to be referring to three aspects of an educational experience, namely, the design of teaching and learning situations, the expectations that all sets of participants bring to the teaching and learning situations, and the discourses underpinning educational provision. The three aspects mentioned resonate with Bernstein’s view that pedagogy is inextricably linked with social relations (Bernstein, 1990; 1996; 1999; 2001).

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<sup>6</sup> Defining disciplines as communities of practice partly overlaps with seeing them as discourse communities although, in the context of the present research, the notion of discourse community is used to emphasize the writing practices favoured by a discipline.



Bernstein's work on pedagogy, although anchored in the context of school education, is relevant for a discussion of postgraduate research training on several planes. Firstly, by emphasizing the social nature of pedagogy, Bernstein arguably "led researchers to focus on interaction between teacher and students in the classroom" (Bourne, 2008, p. 42). The present research looked at in-session interaction in order to derive a pedagogic framing of research training provision. Secondly, a key concept to be found in Bernstein's work is that of official pedagogic discourse, which refers to state discourses on education. The official pedagogic discourse, in Bernstein's view, is recontextualised through and embedded in pedagogic practice (e.g., Bernstein, 1990). As this thesis shows, particularly in **Chapter 2**, different higher education institutions display in their training programmes different interpretations of the official research training discourse, also characterised as the "skills agenda" (Hinchcliffe, Bromley and Hutchinson, 2007). Lastly, the reinterpretation of official pedagogic discourses, as Bernstein argues, has a bearing not only on the knowledge around which educational interaction is organised but also on the identities of learners and trainers, the way in which they are construed by official discourses and the implications this has for the pedagogic practices authorised in relation to each particular activity (e.g., Bernstein, 1999). **Chapters 6 to 8** in this thesis explore the nature of the roles available to participants in cross-disciplinary research training programmes.

### 1.6 Thesis structure

In this chapter I have discussed the traditional humanities model of doctoral/academic research and I have placed this in the context of policy initiatives regarding formal training provision. I have signalled an existing tension between viewing research training as a formal activity, on the one hand, and as an informal process of enculturation, on the other. I have formulated the overarching question of the research and have offered a brief introduction to research design. Finally, I have laid out the key assumptions on which the research was premised.

**Chapter 2** introduces and contextualises a key concept for the present research (i.e., "research training cultures", Deem and Brehony (2000)), summarises insights from the analysis of research training handbooks (*Research component 1*) and sets up questions to be explored in the literature review and the fieldwork. The relevant literature for this research project is reviewed in **Chapters 3** (on doctoral pedagogy and designing courses which target audiences from several disciplines) and **4** (on doctoral writing pedagogy and

advanced academic literacy). **Chapter 5** offers an overview of the data sources for this research and discusses the methodological choices. The two chapters that follow engage with the fieldwork data: the case study (**Chapter 6**, *Research component 3*) and the snapshots (**Chapter 7**, *Research component 4*). **Chapter 7** also summarises the insights from the “how to” guides on writing doctoral theses (*Research component 2*). **Chapter 8** formulates conclusions about the research material, explores their implications for pedagogic practice and suggests further avenues for research.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH TRAINING CULTURES: *PRELIMINARY DATA*

#### 2.1 Introduction

The first data-related component of the research (see Table 1) was designed to identify patterns in research training provision for humanities doctoral students in the UK (outside the supervision relationship). It consisted of content analysis of research training handbooks from 10 universities across the UK and of additional training-related information. As it took place in parallel to the literature review and prefaced the fieldwork in this research, it is presented in this chapter. Although this is not a usual choice for the “textual staging of knowledge” (Lather, 1991) in a doctoral thesis, in the context of the present thesis it offers a solid foundation on which to build an argument about formal research training for humanities doctoral students (outside the supervision relationship). As well as presenting research data, this chapter links the data to and offers a preview of the few existing studies of humanities doctoral students in the UK, studies which are then looked at in detail in the subsequent (first) literature review chapter.

The research on which this thesis reports aimed to contribute to current knowledge on the doctoral experience in the Humanities in the UK by examining the way in which higher education institutions frame this experience in response to the Research Councils’ Joint Statement on training requirements for research students (RCUK, 2001). The Joint Statement (see Appendix 1a) lists skills which can be grouped into four categories:

- a) *technical/transferable skills* (e.g., C4, “use information technology appropriately for database management, recording and presenting information”)
- b) *knowledge-making and communication* (e.g., A5, “the ability to critically analyse and evaluate one’s findings and those of others” and E2, “construct coherent arguments and articulate ideas clearly to a range of audiences, formally and informally through a variety of techniques”)

- c) *reflection on learning* (e.g., G1, “appreciate the need for and show commitment to continued professional development”)
- d) *participating in an academic research environment, both institutional and disciplinary* (e.g., F1, “develop and maintain co-operative networks and working relationships with supervisors, colleagues and peers, within the institution and the wider research community”).

Across the UK, graduate schools in higher education institutions organise research training courses for doctoral students, using the list of skills as a course organisation device, and the Roberts money (linked to the skills list) as the primary source of funding (see Loeffler, 2004).

The Joint Statement has come under attack in a recent monograph on doctoral research in the UK. Green and Powell, the authors of the monograph, write: “Quite where this list of skills comes from is doubtful; certainly it did not involve HEIs nor is it based on any serious research about needs” (2005, p. 28). This critique is highlighted here because the starting point for the present research was the concern that the pedagogic underpinning of research training courses was insufficiently theorised, and that the HEIs may be importing the list of skills into their training programmes uncritically, and with unsatisfactory results.

Of particular interest for the present research, from within the list of skills, were those to do with knowledge-making and writing (categories A and E in the Joint Statement). The QAA (2004) *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Training Programmes* underlines, in its preface, the importance of placing the knowledge-making and writing aspects of research first and foremost in research training:

The research councils and the AHRB would also want to re-emphasise their belief that training in research skills and techniques is the key element in the development of a research student, and that PhD students are expected to *make a substantial, original contribution to knowledge in their area, normally leading to published work*. The development of wider employment-related skills should not detract from that core objective. (p. 33, my emphasis)

Taking the QAA recommendation into account, the overarching question for the present research was phrased as: “How do formal research training cultures support knowledge-making and writing practices at doctoral level in the Humanities in the UK?”. The syntagm “research training cultures” is borrowed from Deem and Brehony’s



(2000) study of doctoral students' access to research cultures. Deem and Brehony note that doctoral students negotiate membership of three different kinds of culture from registration to completion of a PhD:

- 1) a research student culture (which is discipline specific),
- 2) a discipline research culture (which brings together academics from the discipline in which a student's PhD project is housed), and
- 3) a research training culture (which bring together students from a variety of disciplines).

Deem and Brehony's description of research training cultures is as follows:

Research training cultures sit on the boundaries between research student cultures and discipline research cultures. The process of cultural and social construction of these cultures is a relatively recent one in the UK, and its introduction to the social sciences was encouraged by external forces, particularly the demands of the ESRC. Extensive research training has existed for less than a decade. [...] Research training cultures include the values and practices informing the curriculum and pedagogies of training, the content of the courses, the conceptual basis for the legitimisation of training, provision of symbolic meaning, shared aims and purposes, the use of resources such as information technology and the social relations around training provision. (Deem and Brehony, 2000, p. 156)

This chapter takes the notion of the “research training culture” and examines how it materialises in research training courses for humanities doctoral students in a selection of HEIs across the UK.

## **2.2 Research training for humanities PhD students in the UK: Current evidence and debates**

The few reports available on formal research training for humanities doctoral students in the UK (outside the supervision relationship) indicate that uptake of research training courses is problematic and participation in the training culture does not result in an adequate degree of student satisfaction, as is shown below. The following highlights from these studies indicate areas which the students signal as problematic, along with recommendations for change:



- *(case studies in several HEIs)* the distinctive nature of knowledge forms and epistemological processes in humanities disciplines makes generic programmes inadequate for preparing humanities doctoral students to undertake research (UKCGE, 2000)
- *(questionnaires to students at several HEIs, results aggregated for English, Physics and Economics)* just under half of the responses rated the research methods modules as less than satisfactory, and less than 6% thought the module had prepared them very well for the research they were undertaking (Gibbs, 2001)
- *(case study at one HEI)* continuous support is preferable/preferred over concentrating the training in the first year of study (Beattie *et al.*, 2001)
- *(interviews with academics and doctoral students in English in several HEIs)* the apprenticeship model is more suitable than formal training in skills (Williams, 2003).

It would appear, from the findings summarized above, that discipline-specific cultures yield qualitatively better learning than cross-disciplinary environments. This thesis explores peer learning in cross-disciplinary settings and argues that the difference between the two should not be thought of in terms of degree of quality. On the contrary, the kinds of learning projected in each of the two contexts are not directly comparable and respond to different learning agendas.

Williams's (2003) argument (see the last bullet point in the list above) against formalising learning about doctoral research in the Humanities echoes the "lone scholar" model of humanities research. However, there is some evidence that formal training provision in cross-disciplinary environments is not without its benefits. The UKCGE (2000) report, for example, notes that issues such as epistemology, argument and theory are best discussed not at departmental level, but in the "wider intellectual context of debate in the Humanities" (p. 29). This is both to benefit students who specifically identify approaches in other disciplines that might benefit their project, and to enable them to become aware of general intellectual debates in the Humanities which "conform more to paradigmatic than strictly disciplinary differences (for example, tensions between structuralist/poststructuralist approaches on the one hand and social-historical/materialist approaches on the other)" (p. 30). The AHRB (2003) recognised the individual nature of research in the Humanities, but qualified the "lone scholar" notion as "flawed and outmoded":

although the individual researcher carries out research and publishes its outcomes as an individual, he/she is embedded within collaborative

research networks at the institutional, national and international level. Individual research is not simply team research writ small, but it is a distinctive form of intellectual engagement on the one hand and a distinctive form of collaboration on the other. (AHRB, 2003, p. 8)

The responsibility for organizing training in cross-disciplinary environments lies with graduate schools, which are described in the UKCGE (2004) report as:

a convenient device for managing postgraduate provision at the institutional level, moving away from the old ‘personal apprenticeship’ model of a research degree, as well as providing a useful organisational structure for representing the concerns and interests of this constituency at a senior management level. (p. 14)

Different institutions operate with different interpretations of the role of graduate schools in implementing postgraduate policies. The UKCGE report notes that “there is clearly a tension between building a community of postgraduates and building a research community within a discipline” (2004, p. 27).

### **2.3 The focus of *Research component 1* (analysis of research training handbooks)**

Above I have summarized the currently available evidence on the way in which humanities doctoral students learn how to research. Three of the studies cited there reflect the research training experience prior to the formulation of the Joint Skills Statement. The limited evidence available would not allow practitioners to derive rigorous educational principles with reference to the organisation and structuring of research training. The research on which this thesis reports aimed to contribute to the debate on training by examining current (post-Joint Skills Statement) research training provision for humanities doctoral students. Four specific questions were formulated for the analysis of documents collected as part of this first research component:

1. What types of research training culture are configured by research training programmes?
2. What place does writing have in research training programmes?
3. How is research training articulated with two other institutional aspects of the doctoral experience – personal development planning (PDP) processes and supervision?
4. What discourse is used to “sell” (justify) the research training programme?

These questions provide the structure for the following sections of the chapter.

## **2.4 Methods and data sources**

The data discussed in this chapter were drawn entirely from existing documents. I performed a content analysis of research training handbooks, research degree handbooks, additional material on PDP tools and the registration process, information from the graduate school websites and postgraduate prospectuses from ten HEIs across the UK (see Appendix 2a). The selection of HEIs was made on the basis of the location of graduate schools and the type of institution. Following the sampling frame from the UKCGE (2004) report on graduate schools, the following types of institution were represented in the present research: four pre-1960s HEIs (two with a university-wide graduate school, two with a faculty-level graduate school); four 1960-1990 HEIs (two with a university-wide graduate school, two with a faculty-level graduate school); and two post-1990 HEIs (one with a university-wide graduate school, one with a faculty-level graduate school). In the case of the faculty-level graduate schools, these were responsible either for humanities students alone, or for humanities and social sciences students together.

The selection was intended to yield a rich array of types of training provision, which would serve as the basis for an orientative typology of research training cultures. It was also hoped that it would provide points of comparison for use in the analysis of the data from the main case study and snapshots discussed in **Chapters 6 and 7**. Patton (2002) labels this selection technique “stratified purposeful sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 240). Stratified purposeful sampling is similar to stratified random sampling, in that cases are selected under each of a number of categories. Where it differs from stratified random sampling is in sample size; in stratified purposeful sampling, sample sizes are too small to allow generalisation or to support claims of statistical representativeness. Stratified purposeful samples are designed to “capture major variations rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the analysis” (p. 240). The sampled cases led to the identification of three types of research training culture; the case which most closely fitted the third profile was then singled out for an in-depth investigation (see **Chapter 6**).



## 2.5 Findings

### 2.5.1 Types of research training culture

In order to identify patterns in research training provision, the following information was selected from the documents: the content of sessions, the type of skills targeted, type/s of assessment throughout the course, whether the course was available to first-year students only, frequency of sessions, whether the training was generic or discipline-specific, whether the training was compulsory or not.

The Joint Skills Statement is worded at a high level of generality and abstraction, given its intended applicability across the disciplines. The four categories of skills identified initially from the Joint Skills Statement and used in the analysis of documents in this research (see also section 2.1 in this chapter) were:

- a) technical/transferable skills
- b) knowledge-making and communication
- c) reflection on learning
- d) participating in an academic research environment.

These were partially modified, throughout ongoing examination of the documents, to reflect more accurately the types of research training sessions provided by the universities selected for this research and to group and reduce data in a way that would allow the formulation of adequate answers to the research question underlying the present project.

The following categories were used for data analysis within the first research component.

- A. **Context (CXT):** This category was used for sessions related to the context in which doctoral research was carried out. It covered technical/transferable skills (e.g., “Introduction to Endnote”), sessions designed to enable students to reflect on their learning (e.g., “Putting together your training portfolio”) and sessions which addressed issues of participating in an academic environment (e.g., “Project management for research postgraduates”, “Managing the student-supervisor relationship”, “International students’ orientation”, “Safety of researchers working outside the university”). Career planning and teaching were also included here.
- B. **Content (s.cont and r.m.cont):** Content sessions related directly to the intellectual content of a doctoral project. They were of two types: *substantive content* sessions

(focusing on specific epistemologies/methodologies) and *research metalanguage* sessions (e.g., “Researching: Aims, methods, methodologies”, “The nature of enquiry and explanation”).

C. **Student presentations (ST.PRES):** The inclusion, in the training programme, of opportunities for students to present work-in-progress was taken as an indication of support for knowledge-making as a process.

D. **Writing support (WRI).**

The following questions guided analysis of the documents.

- Are training needs analysis (TNA) tools/forms available?
- Are TNA tools/forms linked to progression points (e.g., the first year review)?
- Is university-wide training provision available?
- Is training for humanities students available at faculty level (rather than departmental level)?
- What is the ratio of content to context sessions?
- Are students at any point invited/expected to make work-in-progress presentations (delivered in a cross-disciplinary setting)?
- What is the length of the training programme (year-long, semester-long, miscellaneous)?
- Is writing support available to first-year students?
- Is writing support available to students in subsequent years?
- Is attendance at training sessions described as compulsory?
- Is training assessed in any way other than by attendance-checking?

The data which answer these questions are collated in Appendix 2b. In the case of universities which had both a university-wide and a faculty-level graduate school (and training provision at both levels) I checked whether university-wide training provision and faculty-level provision were articulated as part of a (year-long) consolidated programme or whether they took place in parallel.

As a result of the analysis, three patterns of provision were identified.

### *Type 1 (“salad bar”)*

In a Type 1 context, the students are invited to pick and mix from a menu of transferable/technical skills, pitched at a generic level. Training is not compulsory and

there is no continuity from one session to another (training is delivered in individual, self-contained sessions). Certificates may be available for individual sessions. There is no overt attempt made by the graduate school to create a community of postgraduate students on the basis of knowledge-making practices.

*Type 2 (“eat in or takeaway”)*

University-wide provision of transferable/technical skills training is available, as is input on the process of doctoral research in research metalanguage sessions (r.m.cont). The students are encouraged to put together a portfolio of research training activities attended and guidance on this may be available, but there is no responsibility, at the graduate school level, for organising sessions to do with the intellectual content of the thesis. The discipline-specific input involves attending taught postgraduate modules or one-off departmental seminars, or organising student conferences. The emphasis is on individual student development or on creating a (discipline-specific) research student culture.

*Type 3 (“the village pub”)*

This involves a year-long, faculty based course, focusing on research methods and knowledge-making practices in doctoral research. The students meet weekly or fortnightly. The course comes with certification and foregrounds the staples of doctoral research (the relationship between theory, epistemology and methodology, stages in research, putting together a research proposal, supervision, registration, the literature review, interdisciplinarity, sessions on specific methods/methodologies/theoretical stances). There is continuity from one session to another and the course convenors highlight links among sessions. The emphasis is on providing the basis for bringing together a community of doctoral students at faculty-level (a cross-disciplinary training culture, where everybody knows everybody) and on providing ongoing support at the level of research process.

The structural location of the graduate school (at university or faculty level) did not appear to have a bearing on the balance between training in transferable skills and knowledge-making/writing guidance. Additionally, while universities with faculty-level graduate schools were more likely to provide sessions on specific methodologies, both categories of university addressed knowledge-making issues at an abstract, meta-disciplinary level:



“Framing the research question”  
 “Questioning and interrogating the nature of explanation”  
 “Regularities and irregularities in patterns of inquiry”  
 “Power and knowledge”  
 “Critiques: Feminism and standpoint theory”  
**[Session titles from research training handbooks]**

In HEIs where Type 3 training was provided, there was greater potential to create a strong research training community. **Chapter 6** explores in detail the design of learning about research in a Type 3 research training programme.

### 2.5.2 The place of writing in research training programmes

I examined the writing-related data in *Research component 1* with a view to identifying where writing was located within formal research training programmes and what writing support provision consisted of. The data included factual information (location, date, time, session title, the academic profiles of convenors, number of participants and registration procedure, intended audience), description of session content and organisation, aims, outcomes, evaluative comments made by participants in previous sessions and recommendations to students on preparing for the session (e.g., references for advance reading). The material was written in an impersonal, objective tone (e.g., “This course is designed to help students who are about to start thesis writing”) or using a more personal, direct mode of address (e.g., “This session aims to start you thinking about the key elements of writing.”).

In the feedback on the AHRB Research Training Statements (RTS) submitted to the AHRB in 2004, training on writing falls into the category “written communication skills appropriate for the academic context and beyond”. Written skills are listed under *Core generic skills* rather than under *Subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills* (the two areas in the AHRB’s framework for research training, see Appendix 1b). The extent to which these two diametrically opposite conceptualisations of writing (writing as a set of generic skills vs writing as integral to knowledge-making) surface in the data collected as part of the research component is discussed in this chapter and is taken up again in the discussion of fieldwork data in **Chapter 7**.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A substantial body of literature argues against divorcing writing from the disciplinary context (as is discussed in **Chapter 4**); a second key issue with regard to writing support is positioning writing as integral to the research process and offering training geared towards the process rather than the product (see, for example, Rose and McClafferty, 2001).

### 2.5.2.1 Writing support demographics

For the analysis of course-related documents in the first research component, a tentative question was formulated as to whether opting for one or the other of the two views of academic writing indicated above related to the type of graduate school responsible for providing writing support (university-wide or faculty-specific). The place of the graduate school within the organisational structure of the university, however, did not appear to have a bearing on writing support provision. One HEI with a university-wide graduate school offered “subject-specific” training in writing for humanities students, whereas at two HEIs with faculty-level graduate schools the humanities students were offered generic-type writing support by staff development advisors or writing consultants.

Writing support at the 10 universities selected for *Research component 1* was built around preparing research proposals, writing theses and writing for publication. The outlines for workshops on writing research proposals (available at three out of the 10 research universities) concentrated on the component parts of the proposal and its rhetorical structure. Proposal length varied from university to university (between 1,000 words and approximately 50 pages). The structure of research proposals in the Humanities being less controlled, support was offered in workshops where students could examine previous (successful) proposals and choose a suitable format for their own. The workshops were orientative; they did not appear to displace supervisors from their central role in ensuring adequate completion of the proposal writing task. The sessions relied on facilitating rather than on formal teaching.

The sessions on writing theses, according to the descriptions in the course documents, focused on: the “mechanics” of thesis writing (sentence-level clarity, structure and formatting/presentational elements); features of academic writing, argument, audience awareness; building blocks of articles/theses (introductions, literature review chapters); and strategies for writing. The sessions on writing for publication covered steps in the process of getting published.

Provision varied across the sites in terms of number, duration and frequency of sessions, session content and organisation, session convenor expertise and stage in the research process when it was delivered (see Appendix 2c). At one institution, support for writing outside the supervision relationship was provided by discipline academics, writing specialists and peers; of the remaining universities, five relegated the role of writing support provider to discipline academics and four opted for writing specialists to fulfil this role. However, in none of the 10 cases investigated did writing support



sessions appear to involve students producing or examining their own written work (other than for punctuation or copy-editing). Engaging with students' own writing appeared to be primarily the domain of the student-supervisor relationship.<sup>8</sup>

#### 2.5.2.2 Analysis of writing support data and implications for further analysis

As well as gathering basic descriptive information from the research training course documents discussed here, I coded the content of the session aims and descriptions available. Initial coding of the data took into account the aspects of writing targeted by the session and the activities in which students were invited to engage. The complete list of initial codes is available in Appendix 2d.

The complete list of initial codes (see Appendix 2d) were taken forward into the research and integrated with codes from the analysis of "how to" guides and the fieldwork data. The complete list of initial codes in Appendix 2d was reworked, for the purpose of facilitating the analysis of fieldwork data, into a five-category framework (available in Appendix 2e).

As the purpose of *Research component 1* was to generate questions for the fieldwork (as opposed to constructing theory), analysis consisted of identifying which aspects of doctoral writing and which writing support activities were given prominent positions in writing support initiatives (i.e., the most frequent codes across the 10 sites). Five salient codes were identified:

- audience awareness: making drafts reader-friendly
- writing as a set of practical skills ("immediate, useable methods of improving prose") vs writing as a social activity ("joining a scholarly conversation")
- learning through analysis of expert texts
- managing the relationship between research and textualisation
- prevention/remediation: overcoming writer's block.

To sum up, the analysis of writing-related data from *Research component 1* made the following contribution towards answering the research question:

- a list of initial codes for the analysis of writing-related data (Appendix 2d)

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<sup>8</sup> The research training cultures did not appear to operate as writing groups (places where students shared written work and offered each other feedback).

- an organizing framework for the collection of fieldwork data on writing support (Appendix 2e)
- five writing-related aspects and activities which recurred in writing support provision
- questions to guide data analysis in *Research component 2*
- angles for reviewing the literature in **Chapter 4** (see Appendix 4)
- questions to guide fieldwork data collection.

### 2.5.3 The relationship between research training and supervision

To a certain extent, entry into research training cultures is closely linked to the training needs analysis (TNA) form. The documents examined for the present research, in eight out of 10 cases, stated that the responsibility for guiding the student in filling in the TNA form belonged to the supervisor. In the materials examined there were no overt references to supervisor input into the research training programme or to the way in which formal training and supervision would be expected to complement each other. Thus it can be argued that a formal link between research training and supervision was established through personal development planning processes.

The TNA forms varied in layout:

- a form which requires the student to list the training activities attended
- an unprocessed copy of the Joint Statement with tick boxes
- a complex form modelled on the Joint Statement, but with category descriptors processed and rephrased as first person statements, and which allows students to match Joint Statement categories with the stage/level they have reached in their research (new student, second-year student, final-year/completing student), to identify research training priorities, and to devise an action plan for each year
- entries in a reflective portfolio, leading to the award of a research training certificate and supported by a series of workshops offering guidance on completing the portfolio.

Although the universities that employed the first two categories of TNA form offered a substantial and varied training programme, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the students were helped to develop as reflective learners and researchers. Bingham (2003, quoted in UKGRAD, 2005) promotes the following version of “the underlying philosophy of PDP”: “developing reflective, independent, self-directed learners, with

the emphasis on self-evaluation and decision-making, and NOT on collecting a portfolio of evidence” (p. 5). The last type of TNA form is the only one that brings personal development planning into the research training culture and makes reflection on learning an overtly acknowledged part of this culture.

Another way in which a link was drawn between formal training and supervision (although it did not involve direct supervisor input into the programme) was through including sessions which focused on the supervisory relationship and on the institutional context of PhD research.

#### 2.5.4 The discourses drawn on to explain and justify provision

Based on the documents examined, I was able to identify three different discourses surrounding research training provision:

##### *A. “Money talks”*

The funders figure prominently in the documentation to which students have immediate access. In the preface to one of the research training handbooks it is stated that:

“The research councils and other funders of postgraduate research consider the development of these skills an essential part of the experience of being a postgraduate research student.” [Uni 4]

The course is being “sold” to the students on the basis of its meeting the requirements of the funders. The learning value is pushed into the background; the implied assumption is that if money is available, the policy linked to it has a solid grounding in research and comes with a considered understanding of the learning needs of doctoral students.

##### *B. (Individual) researcher development*

The emphasis in this discourse is on the availability of opportunities for guided individual development. Learning is foregrounded, and placed on a linear, vertical trajectory:

“The majority of courses include provision for student work to be assessed and commented upon by the appropriate course tutor.” [Uni 2]

Researcher development is seen as best achieved through a series of one-to-one encounters with experts.



### ***C. Research training as peer learning/interaction***

Learning is centre-stage in this discourse as well, but it acquires a different meaning. Rather than involving a student and an expert, it is a horizontal, collaborative, sense-making process:

“Along with the aim of training in a range of skills, the programme has a wider objective – to socialise students into the milieu and culture of a research environment. To this end there is a strong emphasis on networking – encouraging students to develop links with each other and with members of staff other than their own supervisors.” [Uni 7]

In the previous discourse (B), learning is primarily a cognitive activity; here, the social aspect of learning is also emphasized.

All discourses were evident in all 10 universities. The analysis of documents revealed that the universities placed different emphasis on each discourse in various sections of the materials detailing training opportunities.

## **2.6 Conclusions, implications, and points for further investigation**

The documents analysed for the research component presented in this chapter offered an overview of current research training provision available to humanities PhD students. It was also possible to identify, by examining the documents, types of writing support available, and the extent of overlap and/or complementarity between formal research training and another key aspect of the doctoral experience, namely supervision. Additionally, the document analysis helped outline three discourses underpinning training provision.

While the documents were instrumental in gaining some perspective on the formal opportunities for learning available to students, it was necessary to conduct a case study of a Type 3 research training programme (organised by a faculty-level graduate school) to probe in-depth the kind of learning that took place in such a programme, as this would most likely yield valuable learning about knowledge-making and writing at the doctoral level and beyond. The third type of research training culture detailed in subsection 2.5.1 places emphasis on knowledge-making and writing, and has the greatest potential to create the “intellectual context of debate” that the UKCGE (2000) report highlights as necessary in the Humanities. Chapter 6 presents the data from the case study component of the fieldwork. The analysis of data from *Research component*



*I* also fed into the second fieldwork component (the snapshots). The data from the snapshots (six writing support sessions outside the case) are included in **Chapter 7**.

The next chapter offers a review of the relevant literature on doctoral pedagogy and on the design of courses which bring together material from several disciplines.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW (I):**

#### ***DOCTORAL RESEARCH TRAINING FOR HUMANITIES STUDENTS***

##### **3.1 Preliminaries**

This literature review provides a rationale for examining settings in which peer and faculty support is available to doctoral students in general, as part of the “postgraduate research pedagogy” strand in this thesis. It synthesizes research-derived insights into research training programmes for doctoral students in the Humanities in particular, insights which guided both data collection and data analysis. It summarises a study of the socialisation of new academics which offered a point of comparison in the analysis of fieldwork data collected as part of this research, as well as a means of sharpening up the emerging concepts and categories. Alongside references to empirical research, this review explores conceptual studies that have contributed to opening up thinking about research training for humanities doctoral students. Lastly, it identifies insights from the existing literature on interdisciplinary pedagogies that resonate with what is happening in a cross-disciplinary research training culture.

Formal research training programmes available to humanities doctoral students in the UK differ in the extent to which they reproduce the “lone scholar” model of research in the Humanities (by organising university-wide transferable skills training but relegating knowledge-making aspects to the domain of the supervision relationship) or integrate knowledge-making into formal research training provision. Integration lies at the basis of Type 3 cross-disciplinary research training cultures, an example of which was explored in the research on which this thesis reports.

This thesis examines to what extent and in what way the peer and faculty support built into a cross-disciplinary training culture for humanities doctoral students has the potential to translate into a positive learning experience. Section 3.2 in this chapter summarises statistical, questionnaire- and interview-based studies of factors influencing completion in doctoral education in general and of the process of disciplinary enculturation in social sciences doctoral research. Section 3.3 brings together the few existing studies on

humanities doctoral students. In section 3.4, the focus is on a study of the socialisation of new academics and the insights this offers into the way in which participants new to a scholarly community negotiate and internalise tacit cultural knowledge. Section 3.5 taps into discussions of doctoral pedagogy which go beyond issues such as “completion rates” and “transferable skills”, whereas section 3.6 synthesizes the lessons to be learnt from research on learning in settings that bring together several disciplines.

A very recent and comprehensive review of the literature on the doctoral experience (Leonard *et al.*, 2006) indicates that, while “there is, as yet, relatively little investigation of students’ views of research training courses” (p. 33), existing research highlights the importance of access to departmental cultures and peer support groups. Eley and Jennings (2005) concur. They drew on their experience of training and professional development for supervisors to produce a collection of vignettes of student-supervisor relationships. Two are of particular relevance for a discussion of access to departmental cultures and peer support groups: Simons’ account of isolation and Hattaway’s contribution on writing issues. Both accounts involve humanities students; the latter is discussed in a later section in this chapter.

Simons (2005) takes an example of the “lone scholar” experience of doctoral research in the Humanities, outlines its shortcomings and contrasts it to having access to a cross-disciplinary training environment. Becky, the student in Simons’ account, found that the institution where she was registered for a PhD in French mediaeval history did not have a postgraduate research culture. This, Simons notes, was very much the opposite of one of Becky’s friends’ experience at another university:

Emma was really enjoying her research into modern German poetry and enthused about the critical theory reading group she was part of and the weekly gender studies seminars she attended. These events usually ended up with everyone going to the pub and carrying on lively debates over drinks or a meal (p. 8).

In contrast to Emma’s experience, Becky’s research entailed individual work in the library and supervision meetings with an eminent academic, whose high opinion Becky was afraid of losing. The supervisor advised Becky to take a particular direction in her research, which “would enable her to make a much greater contribution to original research, indeed, could even be ground-breaking, even though [it was] more risky” (pp. 8-9). Becky was not,

however, able to secure access to the full range of archival material she would have needed and, feeling she had failed with the project, decided to withdraw. The example leads the author to highlight the necessity of creating a “congenial research culture” (p. 11) within the department, which includes postgraduate students and that precludes an exaggerated power imbalance between the novice and the expert (student and supervisor) which may have a detrimental effect on the research. While Simons’ story has a happy ending – the student completes a “very worthy piece of work” (p. 10) after the intervention of the Graduate Research Committee – Simons puts forward two suggestions that would prevent such situations occurring:

1. In disciplines where research is an individual, rather than a group, undertaking, departments need to consider measures to ensure that research students experience a congenial research culture and develop networks with their peers.
2. Students should be made to feel comfortable about seeking pastoral advice other than from their supervisor by contacting a second supervisor and/or the Graduate Tutor. (p. 11)

Simons’s account is based on a case study of an individual student and is “written in a style of a practical guide to help supervisors deal with supervisory problem situations” (p. 5). While not explicitly framed as pedagogic research, it echoes findings from the research studies summarised in this chapter, hence its use here as a point of entry into the discussion of the pedagogic underpinnings of research training cultures.

Becky’s case is an example of a problem which would potentially be solved by giving doctoral students access to a supportive research training culture. As pointed out in the introductory chapter to this thesis, the AHRC is providing funding aimed at doing away with conceptions of humanities research as a “lonely, eremitic occupation” (Lodge, 1965, p. 117). In the following section, I discuss research which provides a further rationale for the creation of settings in which peer and faculty support is available to doctoral students and for the examination of such settings.



## 3.2 Framing the doctoral experience<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2.1 Completion rates and the changing nature of the doctorate

The UK doctoral research landscape is changing. Concerns about completion rates are the driving force behind changes in policies regarding doctoral research. It would, however, be misleading to designate completion as the only catalyst; an equally important factor is the diversifying nature of the doctorate. Park (2005a) calls for “a wholesale revision of assumptions and expectations about what the doctorate is” in light of the recent “move from content to competence” (p. 200) in conceptualisations of doctoral research. As Park notes,

[t]he traditional notion of the *magnum opus* – a piece of research that could have a lasting impact on a discipline – has over the last decade or so been replaced by a more pragmatic notion of a manageable piece of work, of a scope and size that a student could reasonably expect to complete within three years. (p. 198)

Professional and practice-based doctorates are not the object of the present study; however, traditional library-based humanities doctorates have also been placed under the scrutiny of funding bodies, which call for formal training that meets the following criteria: structure, coordination and focus on both transferable and research skills.

UK, North American and Australian studies of factors which influence completion rates point out that peer and faculty support have a positive impact on completion (e.g., Bair and Haworth, 1999; Baird, 1997; HEFCE, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2000; Smith and Naylor, 2001). In the UK, Park (2005b) performed Chi-square tests on doctoral registrations between 1992 and 2001 at a research-intensive university and found that the results, which are statistically significant, show that:

non-completion rates are higher than expected amongst students who are aged over 40, those who come from the UK, those who are registered as part-time, those who are working in non-science disciplines, and those who had not previously studied at this university. (no page number)

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<sup>9</sup> The majority of the research focusing on the postgraduate experience sees a doctorate as fundamentally (if not solely) the process and product of a relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Other components of the postgraduate experience are less frequently acknowledged. Some studies of the role played by libraries (e.g., Macauley and McKnight, 2001 or Unwin *et al.*, 1998) do exist; nevertheless, more research is needed that responds to and reflects on the current tendency in the UK to widen and vary the provision of postgraduate training.

The association between discipline and non-completion is congruent with the HEFCE report finding that “PhD completion rates are significantly affected by the subject area of the PhD” (HEFCE, 2005, p. 27). Also, “the extent to which disciplines have well-established research fields and agreed methodologies” (Park, 2005b) is directly linked to doctoral success. Better submission rates were found in the sciences than in the Arts and Humanities (Park, 2005b; Wright and Cochrane, 2000). This is explained by Wright and Cochrane as potentially caused by less support made available to students in the Arts and Humanities. Park (2005b), however, highlights the importance of combining statistical data with ethnographic interviews with students. Statistical studies of completion rates may offer an overall picture of patterns and trends but they are less successful in identifying individual significant factors affecting completion or in signalling the relationships among them (Wright and Cochrane, 2000). In the North American context, Golde and Dore (2001) link non- or late completion to a lack of understanding, on the students’ part, of what pursuing a doctoral degree entails. Park (2005a) points out that in the UK context these issues are addressed by an increasing number of guidebooks available to doctoral students; however, formal research training programmes arguably fulfil a similar role.

The findings summarised above suggest that formal research training, in order to contribute to a successful doctoral experience, would have to incorporate peer and faculty support, acknowledge the discipline-specific nature of learning how to carry out research, and contribute to making visible the institutional aspects impacting on the doctoral experience.

### 3.2.2 The disciplinary specificity of research training and considerations on peer learning

Research has signalled the lack of sensitivity of postgraduate policies to differences among disciplinary cultures, and has critiqued attempts to impose a natural sciences model of research training onto the Humanities, despite the distinctiveness of its culture (Wright and Cochrane, 2000; Delamont *et al.*, 1997). The plethora of research training programmes that have been run for humanities students since 1997, mostly by humanities academics, would appear to counter this critique; there is, however, very little educational research evidence on such programmes with which to overthrow the critique altogether.

Chiang (2003) argues, on the basis of questionnaire data, that the learning experiences of doctoral students in UK universities are determined by the research training structures in different disciplines. Research training structure refers to the organisation of

“the interaction among doctoral students, supervisors and their research projects in each discipline” (p. 17). Two research training structures are identified: “teamwork” (Chemistry departments) and “individualist” (Education departments). In a teamwork research training structure, projects are shared among the students and supervisor, there is a strong sense of collegiality, and resources are shared. In an individualist research training structure, doctoral students work on individual projects, contact between student and supervisor is less frequent, and there are fewer shared resources. Chiang’s (2003) findings are important in a policy context which emphasizes a move towards the formalisation of research training. Research on disciplinary differences in doctoral socialisation, such as Chiang’s, provides the necessary evidence for arguing against an uncritical translation of research training policies into formal research training programmes. Chiang’s research refers to the overall doctoral experience rather than to support for learning outside the supervisory relationship; the present research focused on a specific component of the doctoral experience, namely formal research training courses organised by graduate schools.

A substantial piece of research which merits particular attention here is Delamont *et al.* (2000). The driving interest behind Delamont *et al.*’s (2000) interview-based research on “success and failure in graduate school” is the way in which research students are “socialised or encultured into the disciplinary knowledge of their academic subject” (p. 183). The sociology of knowledge slant of their study is felicitously embedded within an empirical research design – interviews with postgraduate students, supervisors and graduate school decision-makers in four fields in universities across the UK (social anthropology, human geography, town planning, area, urban and development studies). The requirements imposed by the funding body (ESRC) made ethnographic immersion impractical and led to a reduction in the number of disciplines and fields represented in the study. The interview transcripts were mined thematically and narratively, and the authors of the study also attended to the rhetorical features of the accounts given by the informants.

The research on which Delamont *et al.* (2000) report was placed in the context of policy upheavals that affected postgraduate research in various disciplines, which the authors characterise as “insensitive to differences in disciplinary cultures” (p. 192). The policy context is an essential element of the present study as well, given that at the start of the research the Arts and Humanities Research Board achieved the status of research council and, consequently, patterns of funding and support for humanities research were to undergo a wholesale reorganisation. This makes the present study a useful addition to



existing research on the postgraduate humanities (e.g., Clark, 1993, which arises out of a different research training policy context).

Delamont *et al.*'s (2000) argument that policies display insensitivity to disciplinary differences should not be taken as a wholesale rejection of “teaching” “the technical skills” (p. 35). This has important implications for the design of formal research training programmes, particularly given that, as Delamont *et al.* note, students need “a good grounding in research methods, writing skills and developing cue-consciousness” (p. 46), alongside know-how of a more “tacit and personal” nature, linked to “shar[ing] the habitus of a discipline” (p. 46). Formal research training, thus, has the difficult task of reconciling discipline-specific modes of learning about research, the decontextualised, generic skills discourse of training, and individual students’ development of “cue-consciousness”, i.e., ability to integrate and respond to requirements of different academic cultures, whether research-focused or administrative.

With specific reference to the social sciences, Deem and Brehony (2000) identify three types of research culture in the context of doctoral research: the research student culture (“transitory as well as fragmented” in non-science subjects, p. 153); the research training culture (to which there is noted resistance but whose acceptance may well depend on the training becoming “more embedded into institutions”, p. 158); and academic research cultures (access to which “seems to depend rather a lot on chance and supervisors” and which provide a considerable amount of informal research training, p. 158). Gender, enrolment status (full/part-time and home/international), family commitments, “orientation to academic life”, funding and conceptualisations of the doctoral research process were among the factors that had a bearing on the emphasis that students placed on each culture.

Research training cultures, Deem and Brehony (2000) found, were resisted by home, full-time students, mainly because of a lack of perceived immediate benefit to the students’ projects (a similar attitude was noted in research on humanities postgraduates; see UKCGE, 2000). Deem and Brehony additionally indicate that the social dimension of research training cultures may rank above benefits to do with knowledge-making.

In the first component of the present research, discussed in detail in **Chapter 2**, three types of research training culture were identified.

- Type 1 was the most straightforward materialisation of the decontextualised, generic skills discourse of training.



- Type 2 combined generic and discipline-specific aspects of research training, without appearing to contest the central role of supervision in doctoral research.
- Type 3 integrated generic and discipline-specific aspects in a coherent programme and had the greatest potential, of the three types of research training culture, to draw successfully on peer learning strategies.

While peer learning is promoted, in a Type 3 research training culture, as a valuable strategy in the doctoral context, and educational research acknowledges peer support as having a significant positive impact on timely completion, the activity of learning from peers in the doctoral context is undertheorised. Boud and Lee (2000), one of the very few studies addressing this issue, point out that “peers do not necessarily learn as a natural outcome of their being peers” and argue for the “articulation of a theory of learning” (p. 514) underpinning the creation of research environments.

Boud and Lee echo concerns that doctoral research, although greatly in need of a pedagogic framing, is rarely overtly construed as a pedagogic activity. Their take on the doctoral experience pushes to the foreground the research environment, glossed as the “(physical, virtual and metaphorical) [environment] as students articulated it in discussions with us and as we worked with them on specific initiatives” (p. 505). The research environment is rich in opportunities for peer learning, a mode of learning which Boud and Lee place on a par with the individual supervision relationship (the latter generally deemed as “the privileged, if not the only acknowledged site of pedagogy”, p. 503).

Rather than viewing the research environment simply as a composite of resources, Boud and Lee canvass for an understanding of this as a “more complex and thoughtful learning ecology” (p. 504) within which students are invited to take up peer learning opportunities. The uptake, however, as Boud and Lee point out, is highly dependent on the students’ “operating procedural theories of ‘being a student’, ‘doing a doctorate’, and ‘doing research’” (p. 505) and is at odds with the “still elite, still autonomous, conceptual and pedagogic space of research degree candidature” (p. 510). The notion of “peer” in doctoral research and in academia is multi-dimensional, inviting questions of structural positioning and power; research degree pedagogy, note Boud and Lee, must acknowledge the situatedness, social differentiation, intellectual heterogeneity and geographical dispersion that come with the notion of “peer”.

### **3.3 Research training for humanities PhD students**

Section 3.2 above summarised studies on the doctoral experience in general (in disciplines other than the Humanities) and highlighted that concerns with completion rates and with the changing nature of the doctorate (which fuel current policy-making initiatives) have been accompanied by a recognition of the importance of paying attention to the disciplinary specificity of the context of research training, as well as to the nature and outcomes of learning from peers. This section looks specifically at studies of formal research training for humanities doctoral students, outside the supervision relationship. In the first part I discuss overall training; in the second half I look in detail at one specific aspect of knowledge-making, namely, reading.

#### **3.3.1 Overall training for humanities PhD students**

Systematic research on doctoral education in the Humanities is scarce. A number of statistical studies of completion rates mention humanities students, mostly to indicate low completion rates in comparison to the situation in natural or social sciences doctoral research (e.g., HEFCE, 2005; Wright and Cochrane, 2000). Qualitative research which synthesizes humanities students' perspectives on the doctoral research experience relies on interviews or questionnaires (Beattie *et al.*, 2001; Gibbs, 2001; Williams, 2003), complemented, in one case, by practitioners' own perspective on convening research training programmes (UKCGE, 2000). This section summarises the findings from the four recent qualitative studies identified here, which provided sensitising themes to collect rich data in the fieldwork components of this research and to contextualise the findings in this thesis.

Humanities postgraduate research training (or “preparation and development”, as labelled in UKCGE, 2000) cannot straightforwardly model itself on social sciences training initiatives (UKCGE, 2000). The distinctive nature of knowledge forms and epistemological processes in humanities disciplines makes generic programmes inadequate for preparing postgraduate students to undertake research. As noted in the UKCGE report, the students themselves requested training that was finely tuned to their research needs, in methodologies and epistemological issues with which they could actively engage at the stage at which these were introduced. Generally, unless the PhD project was a close continuation of research carried out at master's level, MA research training modules were not deemed sufficient.

The UKCGE report dismisses linearity in research training programmes and highlights the need for programmes which acknowledge the “continuous questioning and redefinition of research questions” (p. 23) which takes place in the Humanities. Over 90% of survey respondents emphasized the importance of “training related to epistemological issues such as the nature of evidence and of argument, and theoretical issues related to them” (p. 13). This, however, should be placed side by side with the students’ expressed desire to manage their own learning. They also attached value to the independent intellectual pursuits and definitions of doctoral work that stress the individual nature of research in the Humanities.

Epistemology, argument and theory, however, the authors of the UKCGE report recommend, are best discussed not at departmental level, but in the “wider intellectual context of debate in the Humanities” (p. 29). This is both to benefit students who specifically identify approaches in other disciplines that might benefit their project, and to enable them to become aware of general intellectual debates in the Humanities which “conform more to paradigmatic than strictly disciplinary differences (for example, tensions between structuralist/poststructuralist approaches on the one hand and social-historical/materialist approaches on the other)” (p. 30).

Williams (2003), in a report commissioned by the English Subject Centre on research methods training for doctoral students in English, emphasizes that the learning of research methods best takes place through dissertation work at master’s level, followed by acquisition of advanced specialist skills guided by a doctoral supervisor. Williams interviewed 25 staff and 37 doctoral students from “old” and “new” universities; over two thirds of the interviewees came from “old” universities, on the basis that “this is where the bulk of English PhD students are concentrated” (p. 7). The staff interviewed occupied a range of academic positions; the student sample was selected taking into account enrolment status (full- or part-time), gender, stage in the research process, country of origin, employment and educational background (e.g., “traditional student” entrants straight from undergraduate study or students with a number of years of employment experience), funding source and chosen subfield. Williams reports that “some staff were unhappy with the terms ‘skills’ and ‘training’” (p. 10) and preferred instead the labels “research development” or “professional induction”. While she points out that the “communities of practice” metaphor, albeit less mechanistic, is “less well recognised and do[es] not perform the same function” (p. 10), her report nevertheless projects an image of English



departments as environments to which the learning theory of Lave and Wenger can felicitously be applied in relation to postgraduate teaching and training.

Of the key issues addressed in Williams' report, the following had particular relevance for the present research and are explored further below in this section:

- the existence of a core set of skills for English doctoral students
- the delivery of research training
- provision of research training at master's level
- the development of a skills profile for English postgraduates.

While there was widespread agreement among the staff interviewed in Williams (2003) with reference to a core set of skills which the students were expected to acquire, it was felt that "the actual practical techniques of doing them varied not only with the period but with the topic, so that they could only be acquired on an individual basis" (p. 13). One respondent pointed out that

*It is artificial to see skills as being separable from the actual research work... A lot of those skills they learn on the job, and in a more sophisticated and intense way. That makes it hard to teach in a common way. (p. 17)*

Research training in English was contrasted to training in the social sciences:

Research skills also depended on the specialisms of the department and were not seen as 'portable' in the same way that technical skills in other subjects such as statistics might be. (p. 17)

The success of research training was seen as heavily dependent on the research culture and expertise in a given department. There was, however, support among the staff for the idea of regional collaboration, and students "welcome[d] the idea of inter-institutional seminars" (p. 20). At one institution, one of the students interviewed noted:

*We run a PG seminar fortnightly, mainly presentation of work in progress. But we are going to make it more skills based, with shorter presentations like those of business meetings. And we're going to invite*



*speakers about non-academic employment, and things like how to use Power Point. To get more general skills. (p. 21)*

Master's provision, the staff interviewed argued, should have a dual function: both an exit qualification in its own right and preparation for future, more advanced research. At doctoral level, however, a supervisor remarked, "it's the person rather than the place that matters. You want to work with a particular person rather than go to a particular university" (p. 25). The students' answers supported the discipline apprenticeship view of doctoral research by rejecting formal teaching in research methods beyond master's level and favouring instead "seminars, both subject-based and skill-based, and inductive sessions" (p. 27). Thesis writing was one of the aspects both students and staff emphasized as needing to be supported in doctoral research.

Attitudes towards "the articulation of a skills profile for postgraduate students" (p. 39) were mixed: on the one hand, staff claimed that "the danger is that it becomes prescriptive and it becomes harder to accommodate the unusual and the eccentric" (p. 39); on the other hand, skills profiles had the potential to increase students' self-awareness as learners ("it would give the students confidence in the knowledge of their own abilities", p. 40).

While the discipline-apprenticeship model comes across as the preferred form of research training from Williams' data, it does not appear to rely solely on the supervision relationship. Seminars and induction sessions were acknowledged as valuable pedagogic modes of research training.

Gibbs (2001) notes that HE research into doctoral issues has analysed primarily the student-supervisor relationship. Her own research attempts to fill a gap in knowledge about the implications carried by students' learning styles in the context of doctoral research, and about the relationship between learning style and discipline. Although she was unable to establish a correlation between the learning style of students and expectations in their chosen disciplines, Gibbs offered a useful point of reference for the present research as regards the learning experience of students pursuing PhDs in English. She administered questionnaires to 100 English PhD students from four pre-1992 universities, in which she asked about the students' past learning experiences (at undergraduate and master's level), their current learning environment and the experience of being a doctoral student. Subsequent in-depth interviews with a small proportion of the respondents enabled the

researcher to further explore issues flagged up through questionnaire analysis or put potentially ambiguous items in the questionnaire into context; an example of the latter is given by Gibbs herself: “what did ‘somewhat prepared’ mean in reality for a particular student?” (2001, p. 73).

Gibbs reports that just under half the PhD students who filled in the questionnaire rated the research methods modules as less than satisfactory, and less than 6% thought the modules had prepared them very well for the research they were undertaking. The results were aggregated for English, Physics and Economics PhDs and as such do not give an adequate measure for the Humanities discipline selected; however, Gibbs’ discussion of the results echoes statements made in the few available reports on research training needs and provision for humanities students (UKCGE, 2000; Beattie *et al.*, 2001; Williams, 2003). For example, the content of the research training modules was insufficiently finely tuned and students did not find the methods to which they were introduced immediately relevant. On the other hand, the modules were useful in that they reduced the loneliness of the research experience. Personal change was also highlighted (“one English student noted that she was learning about herself, her gender and her consciousness.” p. 123).

Beattie *et al.* (2001) examined supervision and the research environment for English and History doctoral students at the University of York. Their research “aimed to consider best practice in supervision and training of research students, by way of a case study of two humanities disciplines, to respond to student needs as well as university and research council policies.” (p. 4). With reference to the research environment and opportunities for formal training and development they found the following.

- Students would welcome more staff-student interaction either through research groups, social events or a shared common room.
- In larger departments, such as English, students felt that there was particularly a need for people to get together more, for example through a departmental common room, separate MPhil/DPhil training sessions, a mentoring scheme.
- Students would also welcome opportunities to give papers or discuss their work, e.g. graduate conferences or regular graduate seminars. While a number recognise that students must take some responsibility for this, departmental support is also considered important.

- The involvement of DPhil students, who are at a later stage in their degrees, in departmental training programmes was seen as potentially useful. (pp. 45-46)

Beattie *et al.* relied on questionnaires as a data collection method and investigated a context in which substantial and varied formal training provision was available, in History more so than in English. Sessions were found to be “a bit general and basic at times” (p. 38), due to the mixed audience (M.A. and MPhil/DPhil students) and the bullet points above indicate a clear tension between the introductory formal training on offer and students’ requests for interaction with more established members of their disciplinary community.

The studies summarised so far in this section provide insights into the parameters of successful research training for humanities doctoral students, outside the supervision relationship. These insights provided both criteria for selecting the case study and immediate points of comparison in the analysis of data from the case. In the remainder of the section, I summarise models of research and of research training for humanities doctoral students, as formulated by two humanities academics involved in training these students. These models offer further evidence in support of organising research training in settings in which disciplinary specificity is acknowledged.

A considerable number of studies highlight epistemological differences in the way research projects are set up across disciplines. With regard to cultural studies, Johnson *et al.* (2004) identify four different models of research (which broadly cover the humanities research spectrum).

- The dominant model of researching identifies three main moments: the gathering of data, analysis of data and writing up of findings. This is also the order of presentation. After an abstract or introduction, there are sections that review literature and/or theories, describe methods of research, present the data, analyse or comment on it and reach findings.
- In a second model, research is seen in relation to sources or traces that remain from past processes. Research is the discovery and critical interpretation of these sources or traces.
- In a third model, the researching process is the reading or interpreting of texts – from literary works to symbolic actions.
- Finally, research can be conceptualised as a dialogue between the researching self and some other, distanced in time, space, culture and/or social relations. (Johnson *et al.*, 2004, p. 73)



The research processes through which projects adopting one of the four models above are led to completion are made up of a series of “moments”. Johnson *et al.* note that research practices are not deployed in a linear fashion; they favour the label “moments” over “stages” or “phases” because the practices “recur throughout, in different forms and combinations” (p. 62). Such a conceptualisation of the research process lends itself successfully to being translated into a pedagogic approach. It also resonates with Leonard’s (2000) argument in favour of framing the PhD as “a voyage of guided personal intellectual exploration of a specific problem” (2000, p. 186), as opposed to the PhD as

*training*: as the *acquisition* of competencies (not to write a particular thesis but to become a generic researcher) and the trying out of these skills in a short apprenticeship project. This approach is undermining both academic professional skills and the contribution made by PhD research to the creation of new knowledge. (p. 186)

Griffin (2005) favours a proactive model of research training. While she acknowledges the benefit of equipping students with those methods which have a direct bearing on the successful completion of a thesis (and with the meta-discourse required in funding applications and progress reports), she nevertheless argues that a broader coverage of methods in research training programmes is about “opening up the possibilities of the kinds of research one might conduct [...] both immediately and in the future” (2005, p. 4). Counter to prevailing views of methods as “an alien graft upon humanities disciplines”, she advocates “reclaiming those methods, and making them more explicitly our own” (p. 14).

The studies summarised in this subsection of the chapter (3.3.1) endorse initiatives to create research training communities and suggest parameters for the successful training of humanities doctoral students in formally set up cross-disciplinary contexts, based on the views of students and academics. They emphasize the necessity of research training at doctoral level, argue for the integration of content sessions with other aspects of the doctoral experience, call for more staff-student interaction and underline the value of learning from (more advanced) peers. However, they also signal problems with training, the most frequently mentioned problem being a lack of relevance of training courses for individual projects. The present research focused on a course which purported to offer research training that meets the criteria listed immediately above and explores in depth, in Chapter 6, the parameters of learning design in such a setting.



### 3.3.2 Reading

My research focuses on training for students doing library-based humanities doctoral projects. While reading is a major component of doctoral research in general, in the library-based humanities it carries additional weight. Subsection 3.3.1 summarises key findings about training for humanities doctoral students in general. Here I am looking specifically at reading. The present subsection draws both on institutional research and on texts with pedagogic value in order to explore the relationship between reading (traditionally viewed as an individual activity relegated to discipline-specific contexts) and formal research training.

Knowledge-making and writing in doctoral research in the Humanities are fundamentally dependent on the reading practices that the students bring to the research. A cautionary example from contemporary fiction best illustrates the importance of deploying adequate reading strategies in doctoral research:

Camel (whose surname fitted so perfectly his long, stiff-legged stride, humped shoulders and droll, thick-lipped countenance, that it was generally taken to be an inspired nickname) did not seem to be particularly old, but he had been doing his Ph.D. thesis as long as anyone could remember. Its title – ‘Sanitation in Victorian Fiction’ – seemed modest enough; but, as Camel would patiently explain, the absence of references to sanitation was as significant as the presence of the same, and his work thus embraced the entire corpus of Victorian fiction. [...] Camel’s preparatory reading spread out in wider and wider circles, and it often seemed that he was bent on exhausting the entire resources of the Museum library before commencing composition. Some time ago a wild rumour had swept through Bloomsbury to the effect that Camel had written his first chapter, on the hygiene of Neanderthal Man.

(Lodge, *The British Museum is Falling Down*, p. 40)

According to a (positivist) social sciences model, the literature search and review are to be carried out in the first year of a research project. This model may largely hold for all the disciplines, but the knowledge-making practices peculiar to the Humanities make engaging with the literature a less straightforwardly structured activity (the UKCGE (2000) report emphasizes that “a research project in the Humanities undergoes a continuous redefinition”, (p. 8) and that “a continuous questioning and redefinition of the research questions” takes place, p. 23). This renders research training models “imported from elsewhere” not fit for purpose, as noted in the UKCGE report and in the research carried

out by Beattie *et al.* (2001). Although Beattie *et al.*, who examined research training for students in English and History at the University of York, do not mention literature reviews/searches explicitly, overall they found that yearly bibliographical sessions were considered useful by English students (as opposed to concentrating the training in the first year of registration).

Additionally, as Johnson *et al.* (2004) indicate, any reading of primary sources is not an innocent reading. It is underpinned by conceptualisations of meaning and ideological/epistemological commitments, whether to objective and scientific knowledge (e.g., structuralist readings, an analysis of formal and/or functional elements in a text), to understanding texts in the context of the larger cultural formations within which they were produced (e.g., reading public discourse for power relations), or to teasing out the “intersections between fiction and history” (e.g., new historicist or cultural materialist readings) (Johnson *et al.*, 2004). This enumeration of types of reading, while incomplete and favouring cultural studies approaches to scholarship, is nevertheless a good illustration of the close interrelationship between primary and secondary sources evident in the Humanities. Whether or not a reading is overtly theoretically informed, a close understanding of the theories (or contextual material) has an important bearing on those aspects of the primary texts that are highlighted in the analysis, and develop through constant interplay between primary texts and secondary sources.

Keeping in mind the particularities of engaging with the literature in humanities doctoral research, the question arises of how a suitable pedagogic approach can be developed. The “introduction to library resources” sessions in training programmes are seen as the preserve of library staff, whereas the supervisor bears the responsibility of evaluating the written end product. The intermediary phase, in which postgraduates arrive at a more complex understanding of how to engage with secondary sources, relies on interaction with one’s supervisor and other academics, peers and library staff, secondary sources and reviews of secondary sources, as well as from critical reflection on one’s own primary data.<sup>10</sup> Sessions on the critical evaluation of secondary sources are the most problematic to set up within a formal training framework (given that, in order to be successful, they must

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<sup>10</sup> The primary texts are the object of one’s research: fiction, poems, a piece of music, transcripts of oral interaction, sets of letters, sets of documents in a historical archive, paintings, student essays, etc. The secondary sources are academic commentaries on these (or similar) texts (e.g., monographs, journal articles, “how to” guides, biographies, exegeses). In between primary texts and secondary sources lies a range of literature that contributes to illuminating the context of the primary texts (e.g., newspaper articles, pamphlets, scripts of public speeches, memoirs). The boundaries between these categories are not always clear-cut.

be fine-tuned to the disciplinary needs of the novice researchers). This makes them all the more important. On the one hand, they have enormous potential in terms of enabling postgraduates to reach an appropriate level of critical reflexivity; on the other, if inadequately put together, they may project a misleading image of what rigorous and accountable knowledge-making entails.

Delamont *et al.* (2004) caution against expecting research students to have a high level of library skills (particularly as regards periodicals and theses) at the start of their research, and advise supervisors that:

You can help by discussing where you publish, which periodicals you subscribe to yourself, and which ones you have to get online or on inter-library loan, and why. This is often the first opportunity to talk about the learned societies and about academic publishing houses. (Delamont *et al.*, 2004, p. 51)

Whereas the supervisor may provide the starting point for a discussion on identifying and keeping records of the literature for a project, further help is available from professional librarians. By contrast, Delamont *et al.* (2004) point out that “only the supervisor can train the student to read professionally, in a way different from their successful undergraduate reading strategies” (p. 57). There are two statements here that need unpacking. Firstly, that the responsibility for equipping the students with successful reading strategies lies solely with the supervisor. Secondly, that what count as successful reading strategies are not the same at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

In response to the first statement, it must be noted that students’ engagement with secondary sources is determined by a range of contexts outside the supervisory relationship. Increasingly, research students accepted onto a doctoral programme have done a year’s MA or MRes which works to bridge the gap between undergraduate and doctoral work. Moreover, formal research training undertaken by the students in their first year of doctoral research may well work towards fulfilling this aim. The second point to be addressed here, that of a qualitative difference between undergraduate and postgraduate reading skills, can be inferred indirectly from two other studies. In the UKCGE (2000) report, it is noted that M.A. research training was not sufficient for successful PhD research; Gibbs (2001) makes a similar statement.



Delamont *et al.* (2004) cite Delamont (2002), who identifies three types of reading in the context of doctoral research in the humanities and the social sciences: reading on the topic, contrastive reading, and analytical reading. Within a literary research project, for example, the three types of reading could be deployed as follows:

Donald Ross is going to study images of science, scientists and engineers in the novels of Trollope, Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot. His reading on the topic will start with the novels (probably in Trollope's case only a selection of them), central texts of literary criticism and histories of "popular" science in the nineteenth century. The reading for contrast might include histories of science and engineering in other periods (such as Ancient Greece) or other cultures (such as China); contemporary literature with scientific or engineering themes; or studies of other issues in nineteenth century fiction (such as slavery, or illness, or religion). The reading for analytic categories would be literary theory. (Delamont *et al.*, 2004, p. 58)

The first type of reading, Delamont *et al.* note, is "the only kind that most people think of doing, yet it is the least interesting" (p. 58). The last type, reading for analytic categories, can be performed at three levels: that of the "grand" theories, which "explain and generalize about 'life', the universe and everything" (Delamont, 2002, p. 20), that of the "homely" concepts ("for generalizing or pulling together material", p. 16) and that of the analytical concepts generated by respondents. Delamont *et al.* call for training which supports all three types of reading, while paying attention to developing the necessary level of critical reflexivity.

Hattaway (2005) puts forward an example rich in pedagogic implications. The student mentioned in Hattaway's account, Geoffrey, was working on a PhD on "the use of classical mythology in the plays of John Marston, a contemporary of Shakespeare" (p. 37). In order to lead the project to successful completion, he needed to acquire knowledge of the historical background of the period, the range of classical texts with which Marston would have been familiar, Latin, the drama of Marston's contemporaries, theatrical production and consumption, and an understanding of literary devices and verbal subtleties in the language of the primary texts. Additionally, the student was advised by the supervisor to develop a critical framework, possibly drawing on the work of Habermas. Although the student diligently took on board the recommendations, the writing he submitted for consideration by the supervisor and later by the transfer panel was not up to doctoral research standards.



The readers were critical of the student's lack of sensitivity to the language of the plays and his lack of critical engagement with Habermas's theory. The question to be raised here is how could the student develop the expected critical engagement with the theory without adequate training and support. The account reads "[the supervisor] *tentatively raised the question of developing a critical framework*, mentioning the work of Jürgen Habermas" (p. 39, my emphasis) and does not provide any evidence in support of the idea that he had discussed the issue in sufficient detail with the student.

In a Type 2 or 3 research training culture (as described in **Chapter 2**), Geoffrey may have had the opportunity to attend a session on Habermas. This would have enabled him to compare the various ways in which components of the Habermasian stance can be adopted and/or critiqued in research projects. He would also have had the opportunity to identify, from the discussion among the students attending the session and from following up references put forward in the session, ways in which theory can be sensitively imported into one's research and also the limitations of such an approach. This is where a cross-cultural research training group has distinct advantages over supervision sessions as regards the learning derived by the student. The implicit assumption in "tentatively rais[ing] the question of developing a critical framework" is that "good" research students have to work out for themselves what developing a critical framework entails, in accordance with the "lone scholar" model. The scenario sketched above frames the process of learning how to do scholarly research as a scholarly conversation, with the emphasis on dialogue.

It is apparent, from the sources explored in this section, that in the library-based Humanities there is a specific relationship between primary and secondary sources and that reading practices, strategies and purposes, throughout the process of doctoral research, are closely tied to the epistemological make-up of the discipline in which the research is housed. It is also apparent that there is ample scope, in formal research training contexts, to support reading practices.

Research to date on engaging with the literature in doctoral research suggests that fostering adequate reading practices is vital for the successful completion of an adequate PhD thesis, and that reading is both a solitary and a social activity. The survey of research training handbooks in **Chapter 2** found sessions on library skills in all three research training cultures identified, but otherwise encountered limited evidence on training in reading as a formal skill, abstracted from the knowledge context. Reading and critical reflexivity were supported indirectly in doctoral content sessions (see **Chapters 2** and **6** for

a definition of doctoral content sessions). Doctoral content sessions were available in Type 2 and 3 research training cultures; Type 2 cultures appeared to relegate greater control to the student (and supervisor) in choosing immediately relevant sessions, whereas Type 3 cultures arguably encouraged the exercise of critical reflexivity with reference to a variety of theoretical developments, closely related or only tangential to an individual student's research topic.

### **3.4 The socialisation of new academics**

It can be argued that postgraduate research students become engaged in a legitimate form of peripheral participation in academia. As Wenger (1998) explains, summarising previous work by himself and his colleague Jean Lave, peripherality entails a sheltered, organised involvement with a community's practices and an opportunity to both observe and experience these practices. Wenger underlines the importance of officially recognising the position and legitimacy of newcomers within a community which would ensure that their limited level of competence is seen in positive terms, as potential to be worked with rather than as a reason for exclusion. Apprenticeship is differently understood across the disciplines in academia and operates on a variety of bases; however, there is enough evidence that a greater degree of participation in formal training programmes is currently on the agenda for humanities research training initiatives (see Nordling, 2005).

Conceptualising any type of academic culture as a "community of practice" is a standpoint not exempt from criticism, as Trowler and Knight (2000) usefully remind us; nevertheless, it carries the useful requirement to view these not as permanent and bounded entities but as dynamic formations. This subsection looks at a study on the induction of new academic staff in an attempt to establish a connection and continuity between the making visible of the pedagogies of doctoral research and the tacit knowledge that new participants to a scholarly community are expected to negotiate and internalise. In this respect, Trowler and Knight's "Coming to know in higher education: Theorising faculty entry to new work contexts" is a succinct and to the point treatment of the phenomenon of induction into academia, which makes it an excellent selection for discussion below.

Trowler and Knight's (2000) theoretical model of socialisation of new academic appointees is derived not from an investigation of formal induction programmes but from research into the overall "individual and group hermeneutics and practices" (p. 27) which underlie socialisation. Following Grbich (1998), they adopt an understanding of culture as

“dynamic and unbounded, comprising a diversity of groups each with the capacity to develop unique mini cultures” (Grbich, 1998, p. 69) and argue that a productive way of looking at how individuals make sense of the cultural characteristics of an organisational context is to examine how new appointees “come to know”, deploy and modify the discursive resources available to a group. Echoing Lave and Wenger (1991), Trowler and Knight note that “much professional learning is social, provisional, situated, contingent, constructed and cultural in nature” (2000, p. 37).

Trowler and Knight (2000) explain university life in terms of activity systems, and argue that new academic appointees must “establish intersubjectivity” (p. 31), in other words, “share some aspect of situation definitions” (p. 31). Knowledge about university life does not come in the shape of a homogenous and static body which is communicated formally to new appointees, but is a set of constructs which new appointees develop through participating in a community of practice. Furthermore, these constructs are provisional and inflected by relationships of power. On the basis of their analysis of interviews carried out in Canada and the UK, Trowler and Knight emphasize that

the most important way to improve induction is to concentrate on the normal quality of communication and relations in teams and departments. Routine good practice is superior to special institutional induction arrangements, however good they might be. (p. 33)

This dynamic and context-dependent view of culture, identity/identification and learning is a useful heuristic for looking at doctoral students’ socialisation into a scholarly community. Trowler and Knight investigated activity systems and communities of practice with a clearly defined institutional base (i.e., departments and faculties); the doctoral experience is as much connected with the department to which students are attached as it is oriented towards the larger (discipline-circumscribed) scholarly community. At the same time, however, research training outside the supervision relationship, which the present research explored, is more dependent on an institutional base than on links with the wider scholarly community.

### **3.5 Doctoral pedagogy beyond “completion rates” and “transferable skills”**

The previous sections explored a relevant selection of empirical educational research into the doctoral experience. In this section, I have grouped three conceptual studies: Meyer and



Land's (2005) consideration of threshold concepts (and Trafford and Leshem's reworking of this with particular reference to doctorateness); secondly, Barr and Griffiths' (2004) uptake of Arendt's imperative to "train the imagination to go visiting", and Phipps' (2005) conceptualisation of the spaces and relations integral to doctoral research.

Meyer and Land (2005) put forward a conceptual framework for understanding students' engagement with disciplinary knowledge, in particular with the potentially troublesome aspects of knowledge that lead to "a transfiguration of identity and the adoption of an extended discourse" (p. 375) on the part of the learner. They posit the existence of conceptual gateways or "threshold concepts" which lead learners into a state of liminality, glossed as a "conceptual space" in which students negotiate the passage from one level of knowledge (and its accompanying status and identity) to another. Meyer and Land's concern is with course design and evaluation (mostly at the undergraduate level) and with the form empirical research on variation in learning might take; however, they signal that threshold concepts and liminality may function as a potentially fertile heuristic when attempting to explain the transformation of perspective through doctoral research. The "liminally engaged nature of doctoral research" (p. 380), as opposed to undergraduate study, which has more to do with acquiring a knowledge base and with operating within externally defined constraints, calls for a careful consideration of the transition from accumulating the knowledge that defines a discipline to becoming actively engaged in drawing up terms and conditions for the discipline, as it were.<sup>11</sup> Threshold concepts operate not only in the context of charting one's way inside a disciplinary terrain but also in cases in which making sense of discipline-specific epistemological discourses may not be following a path constructed by curriculum designers well-versed in scaffolding the fundamental concepts in a field of knowledge, but may take place in a more haphazard manner. Of particular value to the present research was the link Meyer and Land draw between knowledge and identity – e.g., learning about history and thinking like a historian. Adopting the identity of a historian in doctoral research is entangled with adopting the identity of a doctoral researcher, to begin with, and of an autonomous researcher, gradually, towards the end of the doctoral programme. Thinking like a historian, for example, goes

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<sup>11</sup> Viewing undergraduate study as a mere accumulation of disciplinary knowledge is an oversimplifying gesture; however, this link will be temporarily maintained in this section as a contrastive device with interpretive potential.



hand in hand with thinking like a doctoral candidate (i.e., working within the constraints of a particular genre, the PhD thesis).

Trafford and Leshem (2006) explore doctorateness in a number of disciplines and put forward the view that threshold concepts at the doctoral level operate not in terms of disciplinary content but in terms of generic components such as the conceptual framework that holds a doctoral thesis together. They argue that conceptual frameworks can be viewed as threshold concepts in the context of doctoral research. Their take on threshold concepts has to do with the generic components of doctoral theses rather than substantive topics in specific disciplines. Conceptual frameworks are formed through constantly interrelating the fieldwork data in a research project and the theoretical sources consulted, in a reflective and systematic way. They “give a coherent shape to the research process and provide the scaffolding on which to build a successful doctoral thesis. Articulating the conceptual framework is a necessary precondition for the adequate display of doctorateness in a thesis.” Trafford and Leshem’s arguments are based on their research into doctoral vivas (undertaken as participant observers of vivas in 18 disciplines, in the role of chair, examiner or supervisor in attendance), and on their professional practice of training doctoral candidates and supervisors.

The experience of constructing a conceptual framework, Trafford and Leshem argue, is transformative (it is accompanied by a qualitative increase in the perception of a research topic), irreversible (cannot be unlearned), integrative (it relies on identifying how the components of a thesis interrelate), bounded (it entails acknowledging delimitations) and counter-intuitive (it goes against common-sense perceptions). Acquiring the necessary understanding for the construction of a conceptual framework, Trafford and Leshem point out, is both a cognitive and a social process. Individual, higher-order thinking and reflecting on the intellectual content of a thesis are necessarily supplemented by discussion with others and participation in communities of practice.

Barr and Griffiths’ (2004) contribution to an edited collection on “reclaiming universities from a runaway world” owes its title to Hannah Arendt’s imperative – to “train the imagination to go visiting”. “Visiting,” in Arendt’s conception, means critically engaging with other viewpoints in a way that respects their right to distinctiveness and does not seek to reduce them to a common denominator. Space does not allow for an in-depth consideration of the implications carried by Barr and Griffiths’ conceptualisation of public space and the role of universities as “producers, purveyors and guardians” of public

knowledge; my scope is much narrower, as I will be borrowing the metaphor and outlining its potential for explaining the experience of knowledge construction in cross-disciplinary research training settings. The conceptualisation of public space as a “*social* space of interaction” (p. 87, emphasis added) is particularly fruitful in exploring the doctoral experience. Doctoral students’ entry into the public space of a discipline (on qualitatively different terms from those of undergraduate students) needs to be theorised with the help of a framework which reveals “the spaces in and around” disciplines where researchers “create, articulate and express knowledge” (p. 90). The public/private distinction in academic life is often expressed in terms of the work/home divide; there is, however, equal explanatory power in thinking of academic work and as divided (along not always clearly marked faultlines) into a public sphere (consensually viewed as carrying academic prestige) and a private zone (in which yet unpublished research takes place).

Phipps (2005) puts forward an analogy between graduate research and faithful love. Borrowing from Bauman’s (2003) discussion of love and liquid modernity, she argues that academics can be made not in the “dominant discursive space” of research training and skills, but in the “trickier, transitory set of spaces and relations, relations which [...] work between the metaphors of faithfulness and promiscuity and into the modality of *communitas*” (Phipps, 2005, p. 149).

Faculty-level research training programmes for humanities doctoral students lie on a continuum between the decontextualised skills discourse and the hard-to-pin-down spaces and relations (academic and otherwise) which help release the creative energy to sustain doctoral research projects. *Communitas*, i.e., belonging to a community whose projected benefit is that of “enacting potentiality”, is achievable through “upending the normal operations of social hierarchy and structure” (Phipps, 2005, p. 147) and reconfiguring the “pre-existing experience and awareness of structure” (p. 147). In this sense, research training cultures function as communities of practice whose shared goal is to take apart and recreate the tools and meanings of academic research. *Communitas*, however, as Phipps (2005) cautions, will not materialise through a set of clearly defined steps and conditions drawn up at the level of authority, but is the result of a partial relinquishing of power to the graduate students.

Trafford and Leshem’s research serves as a warrant for creating research training cultures and justifies bringing together doctoral students from various disciplines. It shows that supporting knowledge-making at the doctoral level should rely on making visible the

genre-related requirements and the processes involved in producing new knowledge. Barr and Griffiths further emphasize the importance of critical engagement with other viewpoints that respects their right to distinctiveness; their division of academic space into public and private can be borrowed to make sense of the relationships arising in the doctoral research experience. Phipps (2005) takes the private academic space in doctoral research (the sense-making zone, that of draft chapters and rehearsal of disciplinary identity) and points towards the need to restructure this space in a way that is most productive in fostering creative energy and that involves research students as decision-makers. The insights from these studies are taken forward into the analysis of fieldwork data (Chapters 6 and 7).

In the research reviewed so far in this chapter, there appears to be a lack of articulation between student expectations, pedagogies underpinning formal training provision, stated aims of training courses and student experiences of training. To a certain extent, the stakeholders in the training process (convenors, lecturers and students) are very much aware that training cannot respond 100% to each student's individual needs. Yet the realization on its own does little in the way of enhancing student satisfaction with the training. The Humanities do not have sets of transferable research methods applicable across the disciplinary spectrum; there is no humanities equivalent of case study methodology or focus group interviews. The social sciences research training model, with its emphasis on research training methodology, seems doomed to failure from the start. However, what research training cultures fail to provide in terms of access to the appropriate disciplinary culture, I argue, they have the potential to make up for as regards demystifying doctorateness and the doctoral research process. Cross-disciplinary research training cultures have an advantage over mono-disciplinary cultures in this respect. It is at the point where one goes outside one's disciplinary comfort zone that knowledge-making practices open themselves up for scrutiny.

Spaces outside the comfort zone of a discipline are potentially extremely fruitful for doctoral researchers. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how such spaces can be framed in formal research training programmes, it is necessary to turn to the existing literature on interdisciplinary pedagogy (for a discussion of the difference between inter- and cross-disciplinarity see Chapter 1, section 1.1).



### **3.6 A pedagogy for cross-disciplinary settings**

This thesis argues in favour of replacing the “generic skills” discourse of research training with a “learning through cross-disciplinary cooperation” one, and highlights the risk that the skills discourse may colonize research training provision to the extent of pushing the knowledge-making aspect of research to the margins and the mechanics aspect centre-stage. This section explores the lessons to be learnt from the literature on interdisciplinarity: insights that resonate with what is happening in cross-disciplinary research training cultures. These insights serve as the basis for pedagogic recommendations in the final chapter of the thesis. While the studies discussed below operate with a definition of interdisciplinarity as the integration and synthesis of disciplinary outlooks, and oppose inter- to cross-disciplinarity, the present research has found that a number of issues raised are of particular relevance to doctoral research training.

The question to ask of cross-disciplinary research training programmes is not what degree of integration is achieved at the level of subject-matter knowledge, but what opportunities for learning for transfer are created for the students; not whether the perspectives on doctoral research of the different members of the research training convenor team are coherently articulated, but whether the learning situations are saturated with opportunities for making the most of perspectives not immediately relevant to an individual student’s research. It is the pedagogy that produces the coherence, not the content. Consequently, the literature on interdisciplinarity was relevant for this research not as regards the issue of content integration but as regards the insights it offered into dialogue among participants from different disciplines.

Newell (1994, after Davis and Newell, 1981) lists several positive educational outcomes of courses which combine and integrate various disciplinary outlooks:

an appreciation for perspectives other than one’s own; an ability to evaluate the testimony of experts; tolerance of ambiguity; increased sensitivity to ethical issues; an ability to synthesize or integrate; enlarged perspectives or horizons; more creative, original, or unconventional thinking; increased humility or listening skills; and sensitivity to disciplinary, political or religious bias. (p. 35)

The principles and elements of interdisciplinary course design likely to lead to such outcomes, as argued by Newell, are as follows:



- bringing together an interdisciplinary team who “are open to diverse ways of thinking, wary of absolutism; able to admit that they do not know; good at listening; unconventional, flexible, willing to take risks, self-reflexive, and comfortable with ambiguity.” (p. 37); course convenors and speakers who are “intellectually playful instead of contentious” (p. 38)
- choice of topic which matches the disciplinary expertise of convenors and speakers to student interests; embedding the topic within appropriate disciplines (not substantive topics, but threshold concepts)
- articulating the subtext (“the abstract issue or issues of which the substantive topic of the course is a particular embodiment” p. 42); the example of subtext put forward for a course on poverty is “the conflict among the social sciences over the individuality, autonomy, and rationality of human nature or more generally over the possibility of freedom in a deterministic world” (p. 42)
- giving structural coherence to the sequencing of topics and subtopics and foregrounding the logic behind it (the “conceptual glue that holds the course together”, p. 44)
- including readings which enable the students to “develop [...] some awareness of the key assumptions on which [the] worldviews [of each of the disciplines represented] are predicated” (p. 44)
- matching assignment types to teaching and learning purposes and to tutor and student responsibilities (“Because the teacher cannot be an expert, students cannot expect to sit passively at her or his feet. The teacher becomes a guide or coach, the students explorers or active players”, p. 48)
- “spelling out” the subtext and ensuring that the syllabus (i.e., course description) functions as “preface, annotated table of contents, introduction, and opening paragraph within each chapter [in an authoritative textbook]” (pp. 49-50).

The principles above refer to formal courses; nevertheless, they resonate with studies on the informal cooperation of academics working in different disciplines (e.g., Lattuca and Creamer, 2005). Lattuca and Creamer define learning as the “personal and shared construction of knowledge” (p. 4) and work with a broad definition of interdisciplinarity, which allows them to theorise across a generous spectrum of cross-disciplinary collaboration patterns. Humanities scholars, they point out, are “less likely to engage in

collaborative scholarship” (p. 6), yet this in no way undermines the value of learning from peers. The contributions to the collection edited by Creamer and Lattuca (2005) are “case studies [used] as a source of information about discursive practices and interpersonal and institutional contexts that facilitate or impede interdisciplinary collaboration” (Lattuca and Creamer, p. 5). The case studies are framed by a theory of learning as situated cognition: learning is “inherently constructivist and the learner is the agent who actively makes sense of the world” (p. 17) “in the company of” other (more established) members of the academic community.

Two contributions from the collection edited by Creamer and Lattuca that had particular value in the context of the present research are those by Minnis and John-Steiner (2005), a grounded theorizing project built out of course evaluation data, and Neumann’s (2005) reflection on the “what” of faculty learning. The latter cogently synthesizes the insights from the case studies included in the collection and argues that “although the what of what is being learnt [by faculty] is typically construed as knowledge (for example, subject matter), the what may also be construed as social and cultural practices” (Neumann, 2005, p. 71). In doctoral research, the “what of what is being learnt” falls predominantly into the “social and cultural practices” category: doctoral students learn how to participate successfully in an academic research culture; they learn how to negotiate the conventions and processes associated with doctoral registration at a specific institution; they acquire practical knowledge of teaching in a university. This list is not exhaustive.

Minnis and John-Steiner (2005) report on a case study of an interdisciplinary master’s programme, in which the responsibility to integrate course content “default[ed] to the students as implicit assignments” (p. 49). Their data were drawn from course evaluation questionnaires, field project student journals and an end-of-course focus group on interdisciplinary education. The students highlighted as desirable “greater coordination among the teachers about assignments and expectations of students, more timely and detailed feedback on student work, and, particularly, better modelling of interdisciplinary interaction” (p. 52). The dissonance between these comments and students’ expressed awareness that “unstructured/unplanned interplay between professors, whether agreeing or not, can lead to lots of learning and more critical thinking skills” (p. 53) calls for careful consideration of the design of learning opportunities in contexts where several disciplines are brought together.

Examining cross-disciplinary interaction in both formal and informal settings has to take into account the issue of discipline expertise. Vess and Linkon (2002) argue that disciplinary expertise is not a prerequisite for course convenors, but a thorough grounding in methodologies and assumptions is. The content vs metadisciplinary knowledge debate they set up is particularly relevant for graduate research training; undergraduate interdisciplinarity may be premised on the integration of course content by teaching staff, but graduate dialogues across disciplines take place at an altogether different level, that of knowledge-making rather than knowledge acquisition.

Graduate school, as has repeatedly been pointed out, “has traditionally been conceptualised as the development of a specialisation” (Lattuca, 2001, p. 101). Cross-disciplinary research training is unlikely to have as an outcome the depth that specialisation entails. On the contrary, the experience of learning in cross-disciplinary environments (and of designing learning spaces), to paraphrase Lattuca’s summary of Doll’s (1993) position on postmodern curricula, “is rigorous in its careful and critical exploration of underlying assumptions, multiple perspectives and possibilities” (Lattuca, 2001, p. 153). Lattuca’s research underwrites postmodern curricula as the pedagogy most suited to learning in environments of cross-disciplinary interaction. I refer to Lattuca and Doll’s discussion of postmodern curricula again in the final chapter when I draw together the findings from the two strands of my research.

Another way in which the literature on interdisciplinary research, teaching and learning has offered a valuable contribution to the present project has been through the insights it offers on the issue of transferable skills. Perkins and Salomon (1988) make the following statement on the tension between discipline-specific and transferable skills:

while the findings supporting a “local knowledge” view of expertise are entirely sound, the implications drawn from those findings contra the prospects of transfer are too hasty. Despite the local knowledge results, there are numerous opportunities for transfer. At least three arguments support this viewpoint: (1) disciplinary boundaries are very fuzzy, not representing distinct breaks in the kinds of knowledge or skill that are useful; (2) while much knowledge is local, there are at least a few quite general and important thinking strategies; (3) there are numerous elements of knowledge and skill of intermediate generality that afford some transfer across a limited range of disciplines. (p. 30)



The list of skills in the Research Councils' Joint Statement on training requirements for research students is far from being homogeneous. Whereas technical skills such as the use of Power Point may unproblematically be included in university-wide training provision, constructing arguments or reflecting on one's learning lend themselves less readily to transfer from one context to another.

Perkins and Salomon (1988) theorise transfer, which they divide into "low road" and "high road" types. Low road transfer "reflects the automatic triggering of well-practised routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context"; high road transfer, on the other hand, entails "abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another" (1988, p. 25). Perkins and Salomon allow for the existence of local knowledge that forms the basis of disciplinary expertise, but are equally open to the existence of a category of skills (of intermediate generality) that travel well across disciplinary boundaries. The development of such skills is linked to the style of instruction:

Of course, conventional subject-matter boundaries usually inhibit the emergence of these patterns of thinking of intermediate generality because the style of instruction is so very local that it does not decontextualise the patterns. Bridging and hugging are needed to develop out of the details of the subject matters the overarching principles. (Perkins and Salomon, 1988, p. 31)

Bridging and hugging involve presenting information in different contexts (the former) and supporting the students in identifying "the more general principles behind particular skills or knowledge" (pp. 28-29). Perkins and Salomon's comment lends weight to the argument that the generic/transferable skills rhetoric of research training, resisted by humanities doctoral students and research trainers (see **Chapter 1**, and section 3.3 in this chapter) should be exploited for what it has to offer at the intermediate level of generality, rather than being rejected altogether.

### **3.7 Preliminary conclusions**

The studies summarised in this chapter suggest that the supervisory relationship, the defining and definitive component of the PhD, sometimes modelled on a "pedagogy of

indifference”,<sup>12</sup> appears to be not problematised but complemented by the current preoccupation with diversifying the research training programmes on offer. However, the existing evidence on research training for doctoral students is not sufficiently substantial to serve as a basis for the design of research-informed training programmes. In **Chapter 2** I identified three types of research training culture and I noted that the third type has the greatest potential to yield valuable insights into supporting knowledge-making and writing in cross-disciplinary settings. The review of the literature in this chapter yielded the following points of interests to be explored in the analysis of data derived from my case study of a Type 3 research training programme:

- the interaction within and the development of formal research training programmes
- students’ “operating procedural theories” of “being a doctoral student” and “learning how to carry out research”
- the support for writing available to doctoral students
- opportunities for overt reflection on learning
- opportunities for learning from more advanced peers
- resources and strategies which facilitate the creation of a tightly-knit culture (or the equivalent of a student cohort at the undergraduate level)
- to what extent learning is promoted as a social rather than an individual activity
- the identity work entailed by learning to do doctoral research
- the extent to which research training “trains the imagination to go visiting”
- how much control students have over the decision-making behind formal training course design
- resources, strategies and roles which facilitate learning in cross-disciplinary environments.

These points of interest are taken up in subsequent chapters. **Chapter 4** focuses on the issue of doctoral writing support, and outlines relevant findings from the existing literature on this topic. **Chapter 5** breaks the overarching research question down into subquestions to be asked in each research component (see Table 1) and provides a

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson *et al.* (2000) use the concept of “pedagogy of indifference” to refer to doctoral research experiences in which the supervisor plays a minimal part and the student is left to “sink or swim”.

methodological framing for the questions and points of interest. **Chapters 6 and 7** focus on the data collected and on the ways in which these contribute to existing knowledge about the doctoral experience. Appendix 3 presents a more succinct list of guiding points to which I referred when analysing the data in the “postgraduate research pedagogy” strand of this thesis.



**CHAPTER 4**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW (II):**  
*DOCTORAL WRITING PEDAGOGY*

**4.1 Preliminaries**

Doctoral research in the Humanities is primarily viewed as a point of entry into academia and as a process of socialisation into the scholarly research community. Thesis writing and publishing material from doctoral research are salient components of the process of socialisation into the current academic climate. This thesis takes as its starting point the emphasis that research funders in the UK place on the support available to doctoral researchers, and examines, as part of the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of this research, support for writing outside the supervision relationship, in humanities-wide cross-disciplinary settings. As in the previous chapter, the literature reviewed here has helped delineate the object of study and bring into better focus salient themes from the data collected.

The present chapter focuses on doctoral writing pedagogy for humanities students. It brings together insights from various bodies of literature, which help explain what goes on in the process of learning how to write throughout the doctoral research journey in the Humanities. As such, it engages with writing doctoral theses (sections 4.2 to 4.5) and writing for publication (section 4.6). Sections 4.2 to 4.5, in turn, look at studies of doctoral texts, writers, supervisors, and formal support outside the supervisory relationship. Section 4.6 summarises current research on writing for publication, which, as noted in **Chapter 2**, is addressed in formal research training programmes; both case studies of individual writers and studies of formal support initiatives. Section 4.7 offers an overview of writing pedagogies and conceptualisations of writing which, in subsequent chapters, help give sharper contours to the findings of the research and contribute to formulating valid educational principles for formal writing support outside the supervision relationship. In Appendix 4 I have included a list of questions which guided the selection and review of the literature in this chapter.

The first subsection of the chapter sets out the concepts, assumptions and classifications which served as a starting point for the present research: doctoral

literacy<sup>13</sup> (4.1.1), disciplines as discourse communities and the issue of expertise (4.1.2), assumptions about humanities students' writing practices (4.1.3), and a classification of formal writing support courses (4.1.4). I also provide, at the end of the section, the rationale for bringing together a wide range of sources in this literature review.

#### 4.1.1 Doctoral literacy

This thesis focuses on a specific type of academic literacy: doctoral literacy in the Humanities. The research presented in this thesis is underpinned by a conceptualisation of doctoral literacy as a set of social and cultural practices, highly dependent on the institutional context in which they occur. As such, it positions itself within the field of academic literacies research, as theorised by Street (1984, 1995, 2004, 2005), Lea and Street (1998), and Lillis (2006), among others. Academic literacies research has relied mostly on qualitative case study methodology (Lea, 2004a, p. 2) and has focused its attention on undergraduate and taught postgraduate writing. The research on which this thesis reports relied on qualitative methodology but looked at the doctoral research context; its main aim was to unpack the pedagogic framing of support for knowledge-making and writing outside the supervisory relationship. This thesis enters into dialogue with recent policy initiatives targeted at research degree programmes, policy initiatives which emphasize training outside the supervisory relationship as a necessary component of the doctoral experience.

Academic literacies research “offers a different way of understanding not just student writing, but learning and teaching in higher education more broadly” and “unpacks the ways in which issues of meaning making and identity are implicated, not just in student writing, but in teaching and learning more generally” (Lea, 2004a, p. 6). This makes academic literacies a productive framework for the present research, in that it provides the necessary conceptual tools and theoretical outlook for arriving at an understanding of the way in which doctoral students are supported to negotiate the conventions of scholarly writing, and to change their patterns of participation in the academic community.

Lea and Street (1998) view academic literacies as social practices to be explained in terms of epistemology, identity and power. The “academic literacies” framework

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<sup>13</sup> “Doctoral literacy” is used here as a label primarily for thesis writing and for turning thesis material into published work. “Professional academic writing”, “advanced academic literacies” or “scholarly prose” are related syntagms which have been used, in research on academic prose, to designate the writing that doctoral students and discipline academics are required to produce.

encapsulates and surpasses two previous models – (a) a conceptualisation of writing as a set of (transferable) writing skills and (b) the “academic socialisation” perspective, which attempts to understand and explain the acculturation of students into the discourses of academic communities and which is based on a view of writing as a “transparent medium of representation” (p. 178). What “academic literacies” brings new to the debate on student writing is a position from which writing in academia can be examined as a site where the linguistic and the social, the individual and the institutional, interact, and, in this respect, it surpasses the two previous models.

In the context of doctoral writing, the first model identified by Lea and Street (1998), the skills approach, lends itself to application across the disciplines and focuses on the student, who is expected to acquire a set of writing strategies. These strategies, once mastered, can be applied in a variety of doctoral writing contexts. Students encountering difficulty with doctoral writing would be viewed as in need of remedial writing instruction.

Conceptualising writing as a transparent medium of representation (prevalent in the academic socialisation model) carries with it the assumption that learning how to write entails the unproblematic acquisition of discipline-specific conventions. It assumes the existence of genre templates which help mould knowledge into appropriate, pre-determined modes of expression. This differs from the student deficit model in that it recognises doctoral writing as entailing a higher degree of expertise than undergraduate writing, but is predicated on the assumption that this expertise can be transmitted and internalised outside the “main business” of engaging with disciplinary content. Templates are givens, which the students apply to disciplinary content.

The academic literacies model posits doctoral writing as an integral part of knowledge-making and offers a different legitimation for ongoing provision of writing support than simply that of remediation. Writing is linked with developing a professional academic identity. The existence of writing conventions is acknowledged, but these are viewed as a matter of conscious choice and negotiation rather than straightforward adoption. The heterogeneity of ways of writing within (not only across) disciplines is acknowledged.

#### 4.1.2 Disciplines as discourse communities and the issue of academic expertise

The research on which this thesis reports was underpinned by a conceptualisation of disciplines as communities of practice, whose members have differing degrees of command over the discourses which define each discipline.



It was mentioned in Chapter 1 that Swales (1998) differentiates between: (a) *focus* discourse communities, not sharing a physical location and identified in the present research as the home discipline or subfield of doctoral students, and (b) *place* discourse communities; in this thesis, the groups of doctoral writers who meet face-to-face to learn the genre-specific features of doctoral theses. Research on academic writing which relies on the concept of discourse communities usually refers to the former. Brodkey (1987), for example, defines academic writing as “enter[ing] a conversation already in progress” (Brodkey, 1987). Brodkey’s view on writing is indebted to Hymes’s (1974, pp. 74-75) notion of “speech community”. Academic writers, according to Brodkey, enter an academic discourse community, which is constituted by networks with specific protocols of acculturation:

The practical and methodological reasons for dividing community into subcommunal groups called networks are many, not least important of which is that the relative informality of social networks makes it plausible for a researcher to join a network as “a friend of a friend” (Boissevain, 1974). For the study of academic writing and academic discourse, moreover, a social network and network analysis are mainly important as concepts for describing and interpreting how language use articulates the several versions of community that seem to coexist within what I have been calling the academic community. A network defines the position an individual or group believes itself to be in relative to a community. (p. 36)

Literate activities in academia thus need to be understood in light of “the relationship to a putative academic community and academic culture” (Prior, 1998, p. 37). Entering a discipline-specific conversation presupposes differing degrees of expertise in participants and an expectation that novice conversationalists will in time acquire the relevant resources for a professional performance. The process of acquisition may, however, be problematic.

Geisler (1994) argues that academic expertise and the rhetorical practices that accompany it are part of experts’ tacit knowledge and, as such, are rarely successfully communicated to students. Geisler borrows Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987) distinction between knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming writing practices and uses it to outline the fundamental relationship between subject matter and textualisation in the academic disciplines. She summarises and endorses Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) suggestion that “experts routinely suppress accounts of rhetorical process once they develop convictions about domain content (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984)” (Geisler, 1994, p. 229). When subject matter is taught or communicated, the

traces of rhetorical processes have been removed from accounts of disciplinary knowledge.

MacDonald (1994) signals the “lack of detailed, rhetorically informed linguistic description” (p. 170) to inform pedagogy and proposes a continuum of academic writing along which novices are expected to move:

1. non-academic writing; 2. generalized academic writing concerned with stating claims, offering evidence, respecting others’ opinions, and learning how to write with authority; 3. novice approximations of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge; 4. expert, insider prose. (p. 187)

MacDonald argues that novice approximations of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge should be supported by a pedagogy which echoes the discipline apprenticeship model of learning:

If we decide some form of initiation is appropriate, we need not do everything at once. But there still remains the question of how to initiate students into the appropriate stage. Berkenkotter and Huckin caution that genre knowledge is situated knowledge, best “picked up” through immersion, rather than taught. Kate Ronald’s account of students’ anxiety when asked, as outsiders, to analyse unfamiliar disciplinary conventions should serve to reinforce the caution Berkenkotter and Huckin express; it is entering the disciplinary conversation, rather than analyzing its conventions, that leads to understanding. (pp. 188-9)

MacDonald’s statement illustrates the tension between the various sources of support for doctoral writers (supervisors, peers, writing experts), a tension which surfaces in the “snapshots” data discussed in **Chapter 7** in this thesis.

#### 4.1.3 Assumptions about humanities doctoral students

Writing support at doctoral level in the Humanities, according to Murray (2002), has the difficult task of negotiating some commonly held assumptions about humanities doctoral students’ writing practices:

- Doctoral students can already write.
- All attempts to improve writing are remedial.
- The first writing students submit to supervisors is a draft chapter.
- Progress is indicated and assessed by chapters.
- Doctoral students are natural “loners” and independent thinkers.

- With good students, supervisors make few comments on writing.
- Problems in written expression can be pointed out to the student.
- Students will know how to correct them.
- Drafting is key (but rarely discussed). (Murray, 2002, p. 13)

These assumptions endorse viewing any form of writing support outside the supervision relationship as remedial, a view which the research on which this thesis reports aimed to critique and counteract.

#### 4.1.4 Types of writing support courses

Out of the multiple discursive and material spaces inhabited by doctoral students, the doctoral writing pedagogy strand of this research focused on formal writing support provision outside the supervision relationship and took Torrance *et al.* (1993) as a point of reference for selecting sources of data and the studies on formal writing support outside the supervision relationship reviewed in section 4.5. Torrance *et al.* (1993) designed and evaluated three types of writing course for doctoral students.

1. *A product-centred course.* Here the focus is on rules for producing good writing and on examining standard patterns in academic text.
2. *A cognitive strategies course.* Here the focus is on different strategies for generating ideas and thinking before starting to write.
3. *A generative writing course – with shared revision.* Here the focus is on producing text quickly, and then revising it with colleagues.

The product-centred course was rated lower by the students in Torrance *et al.*'s (1993) research, but the students taking the product-centred or the generative writing course had produced more thesis-related writing in the interval between the end of the course and the second set of questionnaires administered to them. Product-centred courses, however, as Torrance *et al.* argue, should be based on features identified through text-based research as characteristic of the disciplinary community the students are seeking to enter.

Generative writing and shared revision, Torrance *et al.* (1993) note, lead to creation of “a peer support environment which many students are likely to find valuable, given that studying for a research degree can involve considerable isolation” (p. 182). Arguably, however, these courses would have to be “supplemented by discussion with



more experienced academic writers” (p. 182). In generative writing courses, emphasis was placed on writing as a social activity:

the students engaged in several activities which included discussing a version of one of the working drafts which had been re-written by an experienced academic writer (a teaching exercise described by Cohen, 1983), and a “comment while you read” exercise which required students to read a partner’s draft out loud to him or her and to comment on it as they read (adapted from Johnston, 1987). The students also made detailed written comments on each other’s texts. We encouraged the students to treat other people’s comments as a resource to use when building a subsequent draft, rather than simply a way of identifying parts of the existing draft that were in need of correction. The students finished the course by producing a new draft, built up from the original working draft and the comments and responses generated during the reviewing exercises. (p. 173)

Participation in the course was not without its problems: Torrance *et al.* found that “considerable effort and reassurance were necessary to counter the feelings of defensiveness that the shared revision exercises elicited in many students” (p. 175). While defensiveness was not an issue in my research, peer feedback came through from the data as an important aspect of learning about doctoral writing in formal contexts (see Chapter 7).

This section has outlined the preliminary concepts, assumptions and classifications on which the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of this research was built, namely, academic literacies research, place and focus discourse communities, humanities writers as already possessing (the necessary resources to acquire) an adequate degree of expertise, and a classification of formal writing support into “product-centred”, “cognitive strategies” and “generative writing” courses. Before examining textual features of humanities doctoral theses, I would like to draw on Candlin and Plum (1999) to account for the range of sources used in this literature review. As my research uses qualitative educational research methodology to examine the interaction in the formal training of humanities PhD students, I have included in this chapter not only similar research, but also close textual analyses of humanities academic writing, “how to” guides on doctoral research, and studies detailing pedagogic views. This is in response to Candlin and Plum’s (1999) call for “ecologically valid” (Cicourel, 1992) research on academic literacy, which addresses texts, processes and practices in an integrative way.

The range of perspectives and discourses reviewed here has enabled the construction of a richer picture of formal writing support initiatives.<sup>14</sup>

The following four sections examine doctoral writing from different angles. Section 4.2 focuses on texts/products; section 4.3 summarises what is known about how individual doctoral writers negotiate conventions and about how the writing histories of individuals have an impact on thesis production. Section 4.4 focuses on the roles of supervisors. It is in section 4.5 that formal writing support takes centre-stage position.

## 4.2 The humanities doctoral thesis as product

Researchers of academic writing make a basic distinction between the processes of writing and the resulting product/s – texts. The descriptions of writing support sessions examined in *Research component 1* (see Chapter 2) confirm that this distinction is operational in terms of pedagogy as well. This – and Candlin and Plum’s (1999) emphasis on integrative research – prompted me to review, in this section, analysis and discussion of macro-structural and sentence-level features of humanities academic writing, to complement considerations on the writing process in subsequent sections. From a macro-structural view, I focus on literature reviews (identified as the component which distinguishes humanities theses from doctoral writing in other disciplines, see Ridley, 2004) and I bring together a description of features of a humanities literature review chapter from a “how to” guide (Dunleavy, 2003) and research findings on the same issue (Ridley, 2004). The inclusion of the “how to” guide here is motivated by the scarcity of analyses of academic writing from humanities disciplines. From the sentence-level viewpoint, I synthesize relevant findings from both linguistic and rhetorical analyses of humanities academic texts.

Bruce (1994) begins her chapter on supervising literature reviews with a quote from Cooper (1985, p. 6) – “You know one when you see one” – which, she notes, aptly defines the nature and structure of a literature review. Bruce is one of the few pieces of empirical research carried out on the literature search and review practices of postgraduate students. Mostly, information on this topic is available in “how to” guides. To take just two examples, Wisker (2004) aptly summarises the nature and structure of the equivalent of the humanities literature review chapter:

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<sup>14</sup> Piantanida and Garman (1999) refer to the literature review as a “review of discourses”: “[A]cademic/scholarly literature is only one form of discourse that is likely to be occurring about important educational issues. Discourses may also be occurring among various stakeholder groups (e.g., practitioners, consumers, policymakers) and in the media. In crafting a proposal, it is often important to represent these multiple streams of discourse rather than focus only on the formal/theoretical literature.” (p. 99)

A literature review or theoretical perspectives chapter in English and other Arts or Humanities fields would be likely to involve discussion of the methods of critical approaches derived from, for example, postcolonial theorists, or feminist theorists, structuralists, deconstructionists, etc., whose work is being used to ask questions. [...] The ways the texts will be read and debated are, then, informed and indicated by the theorists themselves throughout. Arguments would be established in an introduction incorporating the theoretical perspectives, and interacting throughout the whole thesis. A methodology chapter as such would not be needed, unless different research methods were used, for example by using interviews as well as textual or artefact analysis. (Wisker, 2004, p. 95)

Dunleavy (2003) advises humanities students that they should keep

lead-in materials to a maximum of two chapters. That means you should keep your original literature review down to just a single chapter, ideally one that is framed quite closely around your central research question from the start. Do not raise a lot of broader issues that you will never discuss again or where you have little or no value-added contribution to make. Instead, try to focus on materials that readers ‘need to know’ to appreciate your research contribution and no more. (p. 61)

The textual organisation of a humanities PhD thesis is less standardised than that of its social science counterpart, thus making it more difficult to incorporate into training at a generic level.

Dunleavy (2003), the author of a “how to” guide on doctoral theses, identifies three models of PhD writing: “focusing down”, “opening out” and the “compromise” model. The “focusing down” model relies on a very broad literature review (which, more often than not, creates misleading expectations in the reader), makes a limited original contribution to the field (“it ends ‘not with a bang but with a whimper’”, p. 59), contains thin analysis and can be faulted at the level of complexity of linkages between the analysed data and the research literature. This classical, “big-book” approach to thesis writing is more frequently encountered in the soft disciplines, due to the fact that “many people in the humanities and social sciences regard the ‘focus down’ model of how a doctorate should be structured as either a natural or desirable or inevitable way to do things” (p. 55).

The “opening out” model, more typical of the hard sciences, starts with a brief literature review and set-up chapter,



followed by a section of applied analysis, which tracks back and forth across what has been found out, and connects it up in detail with previous research and literature. Finally, once the author has convincingly established their research credentials the thesis ‘opens out’ into a discussion of the wider themes or theoretical implications arising from the research and discusses possible avenues for the next phase of work in the field. (p. 59)

The “compromise” model, which serves as a template for successful humanities and social sciences theses, relies on “fram[ing] [the literature review] quite closely around [the] central research question from the start” (p. 61).

Choosing the adequate macrostructure (or at least being aware of different possibilities), Dunleavy (2003) argues, should come at the beginning of the research process rather than in the final, writing-up year. The “textual staging of knowledge” (Lather, 1991) in a doctoral thesis, he points out, rarely if ever mirrors the actual research process; this makes it all the more important to build an awareness of textualisation into doctoral pedagogy from the very first day of the research. The implied critique, in Dunleavy (2003), of doctoral writing in the soft disciplines (see, in particular, the focusing down model detailed above), is at the same time a critique of planning and organising the research process. While the critique could be read as an attempt to impose a social sciences model of research onto the Humanities, it can also be taken into account, as in the present research, as a call for research into the processes of humanities academic enquiry and the way these can be formally embedded into doctoral research training programmes.

Ridley (2004) carried out a survey of 50 PhD theses across a broad disciplinary spectrum and compared her findings to similar applied linguistics studies of organisational frameworks for doctoral theses. She used the introductions to the theses to help her ascertain where the literature review was located and she devised a set of patterns which reflect variations in overall textual organisation. Ridley’s Pattern 3 was particularly relevant for the present research; this describes a thesis as having the following component parts:

- Introduction and overall contextualisation of research;
- The main body of the thesis is based on an analysis and interpretation of texts with constant comparison and contrast with the way others have previously analysed these texts;
- Overall discussion and conclusion. (p. 22)

Pattern 3, which, Ridley notes, is typical of humanities disciplines, is largely ignored in applied linguistic research on academic writing. Ridley's Pattern 4, also encountered in humanities theses, differs from Pattern 3 in that the body of the thesis incorporates "theories [which are] put forward and [whose] development and implementation are described and evaluated" (p. 22). What Patterns 3 and 4 have in common is that "the related literature is likely to be interwoven more evenly into the whole thesis" (p. 34); nevertheless, the introductory chapter and the conclusion are the most likely parts of a humanities thesis to contain the theoretical framework and to reflect on the relationship between the written thesis and the discipline(s) which the thesis claims as a home and/or source of intellectual inspiration.

There is a larger proportion of science and social science theses in Ridley's (2004) sample, as compared to the number of humanities theses. However, her study being one of the very few currently available pieces of empirical research on students' understandings of the meaning and role of literature reviews in doctoral research, it offers a useful term of comparison and point of departure for an inquiry into literature review practices at the doctoral level. This is all the more so given two issues raised by Ridley. First of all, following Johns and Swales (2002), Ridley notes different influences on the way a thesis is put together: (a) institutional regulations, (b) departmental expectations, (c) subdisciplinary conventions, (d) the social interactions between students and the scholarly and postgraduate communities to which they belong and (e) their personal preferences (the fifth option added by Ridley). The second important point Ridley makes (supporting an earlier comment by Bruce, 1994) is that "many higher degree students do not have a sophisticated enough understanding of the term literature review in the early stages of their research to complete one satisfactorily" (p. 39).

Textual analyses of humanities writing in undergraduate, postgraduate and scholarly contexts, whether attending to sentence-level features or to whole-text development, indicate that academic writing is a highly heterogeneous category, horizontally, within and across disciplinary boundaries, and vertically, from one level of expertise to another (Bazerman, 1981; Breivega *et al.*, 2002; Coffin, 2002; Dahl, 2004; Fahnestock and Secor, 1991; Groom, 2005; Hyland, 2000; MacDonald, 1992, 1994; Parry, 1998; Scott and Tribble, 2006; Warren, 2006; Wilder, 2002, 2003, 2005). The pedagogic implication of these findings is that writing support at a generic level, in a university-wide context, is least likely to be effective, hence the focus, in my research, on writing support available to humanities students in humanities contexts.

### **4.3 The humanities doctoral thesis as product of a complex set of relationships**

Written products acquire shape as a result of individual writers' literacy practices. Case studies of individual writers and qualitative interviews with small groups of doctoral students construct a view of doctoral writing as entailing a passage from novice to expert status (accompanied by gradual change in positioning from knowledge-teller to knowledge-transformer, see Geisler, 1994), and as a social rather than individual activity, dependent on access to discipline academics and to a group of peers. The literatures on native English speaker and on non-native English speaker doctoral writers exist mostly in parallel. Citing practices infrequently make a link between the two bodies of literature. However, the emphasis on writing as a social practice appears to be common to the two, which justifies bringing them together in this section. The cases of Nate, Lilah and Li are drawn from the US context, whereas Turner (2004) exemplifies the case of a doctoral student in the UK.

These studies raise issues specific to the individual doctoral writers around which the studies are based and, while some of these issues do not surface in the writing snapshot data discussed in **Chapter 7**, they are summarised here to emphasize the social nature of doctoral writing and they are taken up again in **Chapter 7** where I discuss the relationship between writer profiles and pedagogic underpinnings of writing support.

#### 4.3.1 Nate

Berkenkotter and Huckin's (1995) "tale"<sup>15</sup> of a doctoral student learning the conventions and conversations of one community of practice" (p. 117) has as its protagonist "Nate", a first year doctoral student in the Rhetoric Programme at a research-intensive university in the US. The authors relied on textual data (formal writing assignments submitted by the student as part of the coursework and once- or twice-weekly self-reports produced as part of the research) to outline the trajectory of Nate's enculturation into the target academic community. Nate's engagement in the discourse communities constitutive of the Rhetoric Programme entailed negotiating three different and partially competing identities: that of a teacher of writing at an open admissions college, that of an expressive writer familiar with process-oriented composition pedagogy (which places emphasis on individual voice), and that of a doctoral student in the Rhetoric Programme (which brought with it the requirement to produce social sciences expository prose).

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<sup>15</sup> Berkenkotter and Huckin use the term "tale" as defined by van Maanen (1988).



Nate had “little background knowledge to bring to bear on his reading” (p. 125) in the initial stage of the doctoral programme and used the personal, expressive style of writing to integrate the new information gained from reading with his experience and existing knowledge and to make it personally meaningful. His initial failure to accommodate the conventions of impersonal, expository prose was apparent in the writer-based focus of his papers; in the words of one of his professors, Nate wrote as if he had been “wrestling with the ideas himself instead of trying to explain them to a reader” (p. 124). Nate’s early papers lacked the necessary rhetorical structure that made them reader-friendly. Later papers, however, made use of elaborate comments which positioned Nate as a researcher aware of the conversations in the discipline rather than a teacher/practitioner narrating his teaching experience (an example of such comment is “questions and complaints about the practicality of heuristic models and strategies should be answered – and carefully – with evidence”, p. 136). Additionally, Berkenkotter and Huckin note that Nate’s development as a writer followed a trajectory from a *writer as knower* position (where the emphasis in writing is on the writer himself) to *writer as observer* (where the focus is on the research and the writer cultivates a degree of detachment from the material).

Nate’s experience of learning how to write at doctoral level is framed by a view of learning as arising from individual engagement with advanced academic prose (the readings for the course) and feedback from the professors to whom course assignments were submitted. Berkenkotter and Huckin conclude from the data that subject-matter knowledge was derived more readily than “the situationally appropriate linguistic and rhetorical conventions” (p. 141). Developing an awareness of the rhetorical aspects of writing does not appear to have been supported in the programme and written assignments in the first-year taught component of the programme were examined by academic staff in final form.

#### 4.3.2 Lilah

Prior (1998) borrows Goffman’s (1981) concept of lamination to theorise the multiple strands of literate activity in which graduate writing is embedded. He exemplifies this through the case study of Lilah, a native speaker graduate student in the taught component of the doctoral programme in American Studies in the US. The process log Lilah produced for Prior’s research focused on the writing of two papers to be submitted as drafts (for initial feedback) and then in final version form, and on one paper to be submitted in final form only; he “point[ed] to the ways that [her] home and community

spheres of activity as well as special topics of the seminars [...] were intermingling in Lilah's representations of these tasks" (p. 253). Lilah's comment on her paper on Chicano ethnicity shows how her understanding of the topic was shaped by her lifeworld: her husband, Greg, worked in the field of community economic development and Lilah questions her own ethnic identity and viewpoint when writing about a culture other than her own. "Lilah's log entry," Prior notes, "traces a kaleidoscopic trajectory of chronotopes, of pasts, presents, and projected futures, personal and global, situated and abstract" (p. 255), "indexing the vertical lamination of her multiple activity footings" (p. 255).<sup>16</sup>

Lilah's log details how her awareness of the professors as readers influenced her choice of writing style (informal and playful vs historical account, succinct and specific). One of the professors was perceived as "uninterested and unappreciative" of her writing, "distant, disconnected, not motivating"; a second one was strict with deadlines, whereas the third was "a kindred spirit, a creative writer with a sense of humour, an interested, engaged, critical reader" (p. 264). The third professor's feedback on Lilah's paper, however, was "much less engaged than she had expected" (p. 267). Consequently, he is removed from Lilah's list of possible dissertation advisors. The feedback Lilah received on her three papers, Prior notes, left her wondering "whether she was even in the right department" (p. 268) – the forms of disciplinarity she displayed in her writing did not match the professors' perspectives.

Prior's concern, in analysing Lilah's process logs, is with "how disciplinarity is produced and sustained" (p. 268). He pieces together information from the process logs, interviews with Lilah and her professors and Lilah's written work to identify Lilah's alignment with the audiences for her writing. What stands out from Prior's discussion of Lilah's case, however, is the role of feedback in confirming the validity of disciplinary alignments or signalling problematic uptakes of disciplinary ways of writing. Feedback from discipline insiders was foregrounded as the way in which doctoral writers are supported in developing a more established disciplinary voice. Learning how to write, thus, is a profoundly social and situated activity. The formative potential of literate activity in the taught component of doctoral programmes appears to be determined by the discipline insiders' level of engagement with doctoral student writing.

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<sup>16</sup> The discussion of Lilah's case is centred on the literate activity she deploys for the seminars; we are not given information about her writing experience prior to entering the doctoral programme. The present research focused on formal, in-the-classroom support for writing in disciplines in which the writers' lifeworlds do not have a direct impact on their academic texts. Consequently, it did not take up Prior's recommendations on extending the research design to capture the impact of the writers' lifeworlds on their literate activity, although it recognizes its validity.

Writing in the taught component of US graduate schools is closely aligned, in content and rhetorical expectations, with the particular taught module the students are attending; furthermore, the understanding of the tasks is shaped by discussions with peers from the same disciplinary group and by the substantive input the professor provides. Thesis writing, however, in the UK context, does not usually benefit from participation in a group which shares bibliographic references and knowledge of particular research perspectives and methodologies.

#### 4.3.3 Li

Belcher (1994) found in the US context that a dialogic approach to the advisor/advisee relationship was more conducive to the successful completion of the dissertation than a hierarchical one. Belcher endorses Lave and Wenger's (1991) criticism of the cognitive apprenticeship model in the context of ESL writers of doctoral dissertations. The criticism is directed towards assumptions that supervisors can intuitively provide scaffolding for the apprentice, towards the lack of attention paid by promoters of this model to the disciplinary community the student seeks to enter and towards positioning the student as a passive apprentice rather than as an active participant in the learning process.

One of the students who took part in Belcher's dissertation writing class, and whose experience was reported in the article, completed one dissertation chapter only, after which he withdrew from academia. The student, Li, whose research interests lay with turn-of-the-century Chinese fiction, was thoroughly familiar with Western critical theory but, according to his advisor, failed to develop a critically analytical stance towards the theories he was attempting to incorporate into his research. As his advisor noted, Li had found "the community of old-style literary historians in his department [...] 'to comfort him'" (p. 27). Thus, Li's writing displayed a high density of references and allusions to theorists and the advisor's criticism of the use of theory was perceived by Li as a "flat rejection of [theory] rather than as an effort to push Li toward a more critically analytical stance" (p. 27). The mismatch between Li's and his advisor's genre-related expectations and their allegiance to different communities of practice led to Li's withdrawal from the programme, notwithstanding his proficiency in English and his familiarity with the subject-matter.

Belcher writes that



For some graduate students, both non-native speakers and native speakers, it may be crucial to find a mentor who can inspire enough trust and admiration in students to encourage the risk-taking entailed in challenging and attempting to contribute to the established knowledge of a community (see Geisler, 1990). (p. 32)

Such relationship, however, she notes, may well depend on gender, discipline or personality. Other factors that can be added to Belcher's list are experience of other national academic contexts and self-awareness as a learner.

#### 4.3.4 Soyang

Belcher (1994) shows how lack of linguistic proficiency is not necessarily an impediment to becoming a successful member of an academic community in an Anglophone context. Having access to a mentor who organises appropriate learning experiences can help an "ungrammatical" (p. 31) doctoral student with "little faith in themselves as independent researchers" (p. 30) become principal investigator on a project. The example she gives in this respect is of a doctoral student in human nutrition, whose research involved laboratory experiments. As Belcher notes, however, the importance and nature of language proficiency may vary with discipline.

Linguistic proficiency, as Turner (2004) points out, needs to be understood in the context of the genre in which it is deployed. In her research with a Korean student whose thesis drew on psychoanalysis and postcolonialism, Turner found that the syntactic influence of the student's native language on her writing style made her argument at times difficult to follow in writing. The choice of grammatical structures in the case discussed by Turner (2004) was inappropriate not from the point of view of grammatical accuracy but on account of not meeting the "short and sweet" criterion for academic prose. The student justified the convoluted structure of her writing as follows: "Oh, but there are so many possibilities – I can't just say that. I don't want to give the impression that I have absolute knowledge or that there is just one possibility." (p. 26).

The student's desire "not only to write outside totalising discourses, but also to 'write well' be persuasive and say something fresh in her PhD, which she wanted people to take notice of" (p. 30) could not be successfully accommodated by the conventions of thesis writing. It was not the quality of the student's thinking but the grammatical structure of her written work that required improvement. One important implication of Turner's study is the problematisation of the concept of language proficiency in the context of doctoral literacy (new rhetorical practices "routinely question the traditional norms of knowledge-making", p. 34, while doctoral literacy

remains associated with clarity of exposition, p. 37) and the role of a proofreader in textual production (the extent to which a proofreader can intervene in the text without altering its meaning).

The four studies of individual writers summarised in this section exemplify interaction between writers and a range of sources of doctoral writing “know how”: expert academic prose, discipline academics, writing experts. They also provide evidence against three of the assumptions held about humanities doctoral students, namely that they “can already write”, that “all attempts to improve writing are remedial”, and that “doctoral students are natural ‘loners’ and independent thinkers” (Murray, 2002, see section 4.1.3 in this chapter). The experiences described in this section emphasize the social nature of learning how to write, endorse Belcher’s (1994) problematisation of the cognitive apprenticeship model and extend it to native speaker writing contexts. While lack of language proficiency can be a barrier in learning how to construct expert academic prose, language proficiency in itself is not a guarantee of success.

With the exception of the fourth case, which focuses specifically on language/writing support, supervisors were positioned as central to the thesis development process. Offering feedback on writing, as the studies indicate, however, was not an unproblematic activity. Mismatch between students’ expectations of what feedback would entail and supervisors’ level of engagement with the writing had a bearing on the degree of success with which the students developed expert writer identities. The following section examines supervisors’ role with reference to writing development and raises questions about the relationship between discipline expert input on student writing and formal writing support.

#### **4.4 Supervising writing**

With the exception of Turner (2004), writing is discussed in the case studies reviewed above with reference to the context of supervision. Although the present research focused on formal writing support in research training programmes, outside the supervision relationship, insights from research on supervision and writing are summarised in this section. This is based on the assumption that supervision and formal support for writing overlap and that theorising formal writing support must take into account the complementarity of the two. Thus this section draws on four key studies on the supervision of writing: Hasrati’s (2005) research on Iranian students, Dysthe’s (2002) typology of supervisory practices in Norway, Kamler and Thomson’s (2004;

2006) work on the relationship between doctoral writing and identity, and Delamont *et al.*'s (2004) guide for doctoral supervisors.

Hasrati (2005) found from interviews with Iranian engineering and social sciences/humanities doctoral students that students perceived feedback on written work as an important aspect of learning how to write a thesis, but that some "supervisors attended to only formal features of writing, without paying attention to the content of what [the students] wrote" (p. 565). Hasrati's finding echoes the ambiguity revealed by research on the process of doctoral writing with reference to the roles of supervisors in supporting thesis production. In Hasrati's research (2005; 2003), supervisors appeared to be playing the role of writing experts rather than discipline experts. Read through the lens of the cases discussed in the previous section, supervisors' uptake of the writing expert role positioned the students as deficient language users, whereas attending to content might have enabled the students to approach knowledge-making with a greater degree of confidence.

Dysthe (2002, pp. 518-519) identified three models of supervision based on the place of writing in the student-supervisor relationship in Norway:

*The teaching model* describes a traditional teacher-student relationship defined by an emphasis on asymmetry, status difference, and dependency. Feedback is seen as correction, and students rarely hand in exploratory texts. This model may be driven by the supervisor's conceptualization of the relationship but just as often by the student's expectations and by a joint focus on effectiveness in relation to producing an acceptable thesis.

*The partnership model* is more symmetrical: the student's thesis is seen as a joint project. The contractual nature of cooperation is emphasized. Feedback is presented in dialogue, and exploratory texts form a basis for discussion. There seems to be a more conscious pedagogic philosophy behind this model, and the supervisor aims at fostering independent thinking.

*The apprenticeship model* is characterized by the student's learning by observing and performing tasks in the company of the supervisor. The student and the supervisor may be involved in a joint project, but there is no doubt about who is the master. This model is distinguished from the partnership model in that the supervisor assumes a much clearer authority base that is recognized by both parties. It is distinguished from the teaching model by its cooperative nature, often as part of a larger research team.



In the partnership model, “the symmetry is not symmetry of knowledge or experience. It has more to do with the task of the thesis being seen as a joint responsibility and the contractual nature of the cooperation between the teacher and the student” (p. 520).

Dysthe’s research is underpinned by a view of student-supervisor relationships as dialogic, as co-constructing knowledge in a specific institutional context, and as being played out in disciplinary discourse communities, which “are far from being homogenous, abstract entities, independent of time and place” (p. 502).<sup>17</sup> Conceptions of textual ownership had a bearing on the supervision model adopted, as did conceptions of student identity. Variation in choice of supervision style was also determined by the stage of the research process. Lastly, the place of exploratory texts (i.e. drafts) in the supervision relationship was highlighted as problematic. Unsuccessful use of exploratory texts occurred in situations in which the supervisors failed to offer feedback adequate to the type of writing; students’ concern with the identity they were projecting through incompletely processed texts was also an important factor. The students who produced exploratory texts more readily took risks and were creative and productive in their research.

Kamler and Thomson (2006), the authors of the third study on which this section focuses, put writing at the centre of postgraduate pedagogy, in line with Wolcott (2001) and others who view research and writing as fundamentally interconnected. Their pedagogic approach is embedded in Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional model of discourse (text, practice and social practice), as well as in the academic literacies framework.<sup>18</sup> Writing is viewed as inextricably linked with scholar identity and with the broader institutional context, and research and writing are seen as happening concomitantly rather than in sequence.

Given the emphasis on doctoral research as “text work/identity work”, Kamler and Thomson explore conference presentations and conference paper abstracts, which they conceptualise as “a space for taking forward doctoral writing-in-progress and for the formation of a doctoral identity” (2006, p. 23). Literature reviews, an equally important site for the enactment of disciplinary conversations, are framed as “working

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<sup>17</sup> Dysthe found that, in the Humanities, audience awareness was emphasized by supervisors as an important element in the process of learning how to produce a thesis.

<sup>18</sup> Fairclough (1992) sees texts as inextricably linked with processes of textual production and consumption, which, in their turn, are embedded in wider social contexts and practices. Kamler and Thomson apply this three-dimensional model of discourse to doctoral writing. Texts, they argue, are “situated within teaching and learning relationships with supervisors and others, relationships which influence the text and how it is written” (2006, p. 21). At the same time, however, doctoral writing is situated in a “broader social and cultural context” which “includes specific academic and disciplinary practices as well as the broader relations of power and domination which shape university cultures and practices” (2006, p. 21).

in the field of knowledge production” (p. 45). A useful metaphor Kamler and Thomson put forward is that of a dinner party: a successful literature review is “a dinner party where the host is orchestrating the conversation and calling the shots in an elegant and respectful way” (p. 43). In terms of pedagogy, the “orchestration” of a literature review, they argue, can be achieved through modelling discipline-specific strategies. Kamler and Thomson note that:

[o]ur approach is to collect sample literature reviews, written by experienced researchers in particular fields. We ask doctoral researchers to look carefully at the way other scholars write, to read like a ‘writer’. But we find they need guidance to do this kind of text work and it helps if they have some sense of the generic conventions being used in different fields. (pp. 50-51)

Joint construction of literature maps and raising awareness of the language in which expert writers couch claims and moves in research writing are two strategies that Kamler and Thomson recommend supervisors should use. Another recommendation they make is that students start with “chunks of text” rather than chapter structures.

This work-in-progress approach to producing a thesis in the initial stages of research differentiates Kamler and Thomson’s work from the plethora of “how to” guides currently available in that it awards greater legitimacy to unfinished, provisional texts in supervision sessions. Supervision reframed as writing pedagogy begins not with draft chapters but with any kind of writing which enables the student to enter a learning/disciplinary conversation, thus bringing identity work to the foreground.

Kamler and Thomson appear to conflate the discipline expert/writing expert roles and to endorse a supervisor role which combines features from the partnership and apprenticeship models identified by Dysthe. By putting writing at the centre of doctoral research, it could be argued that Kamler and Thomson legitimise writing support (both supervisory and outside the supervision relationship) as part of knowledge-making and not as a remedial activity or the communication of a set of conventions that can unproblematically be applied.

Delamont *et al.*’s (2004) guide for doctoral supervisors draws on extensive research into doctoral study and on the authors’ supervision and training experience. The guide’s grounding in research justifies its inclusion in this section. The view of writing which Delamont *et al.* put forward is one of “a technical skill that can be learnt, not a ‘natural’ talent given only to a few” (p. 125). The supervisor, they emphasize, has the responsibility to encourage students to develop productive work habits. This, they

go on to argue, needs to be understood as taking place in the context of a relationship jointly constructed by student and supervisor. In contrast to the conceptualisation of theses as highly controlled genres, Delamont *et al.* emphasize that thesis writing is

more liberating than trying to produce the equivalent output in terms of research reports and journal articles. A thesis is much less restrictive in terms of formats, style, internal structure and length than articles or research reports: the author of a thesis can be more idiosyncratic, can set the agenda, can control the process much more. (p. 128)

Consequently, “writing a thesis should be exhilarating, not a crushing obligation” (p. 128). Qualifying thesis writing as exhilarating does not preclude recognising potential sources of difficulty in the process.

Above all, thesis writing is developmental; Delamont *et al.* (2004) quote the following excerpt from an interview with a doctoral supervisor in Philosophy (Pearson, 2002), which provides a telling illustration of this:

But in the first year of the PhD, lots of reading – reading around, rather than doing lots of writing, because anything you write in the first year of your PhD is probably gonna strike you after a couple of years as being, you know, sort of unformed and naïve or just off the point, so, a bit of writing just to keep their hand in. I think you need to do that: produce a bit of work every month, but not anything thesis-related really. It’s a good thing nowadays – again with the RAE – for them to produce a couple of reviews for a journal. (Professor Olbrick, philosophy) (Delamont *et al.*, 2004, p. 119)

Developmental stages do not uniformly occur across projects and disciplines. Apart from supervisors, sources of support are available in printed form (students should be encouraged to think positively about [books of advice] – that there is nothing intrinsically stigmatising or ‘naff’ about using them, and thinking in a critical way about one’s writing”, p. 130) or as seminars and workshops which help participants “become self-conscious about their writing practices and experiment with other ways of writing” (p. 134). Thesis writing is not a linear process and it is unlikely that doctoral students will succeed in producing complete chapter drafts in sequence.

The research reviewed in this section identifies multiple positions from which supervisors engage with student writing: Hasrati’s (2003; 2005) study suggests a first possible division between the discipline expert and writing expert roles; Dysthe (2002)



puts forward three supervisor roles (teacher, “master”, partner); Kamler and Thomson (2006) conflate the discipline and writing expert roles and advise that supervisors should guide selection and analysis of expert texts to help doctoral students develop as writers; and Delamont *et al.* (2004) encourage supervisors to create in students a positive attitude towards the use of “how to” guides on writing and towards accessing writing support outside the supervision relationship. The four studies summarised in this section justify placing writing support provider roles on a continuum rather than making a clear-cut distinction between the subject expert and the writing expert roles. They also blur the boundaries between supervision and forms of writing support provision outside the supervision relationship. The next section looks specifically at writing support provision by non-subject-specialists in order to identify how learning about writing takes place in single- or cross-disciplinary groups.

#### **4.5 Writing support outside the supervisory relationship**

As both Kamler and Thomson (2006) and Delamont *et al.* (2004) point out, writing support is not expected to take place in the context of a student-supervisor relationship only. Writing groups, initiated by the supervisor or by a language specialist, are equally important in a pedagogy that takes into account both theses and post-PhD writing.

Studies of writing support initiatives are derived almost exclusively from the Australian, North American and New Zealand contexts; the UK context has put forward a productive writing research framework (academic literacies) and a number of writing training initiatives, yet it lags behind as regards studies of doctoral writing pedagogy that can offer new insights into learning conversations and inform policy initiatives.

The first two studies to be reviewed in this section, Caffarella and Barnett (2000) and Topping *et al.* (2000), are framed as research into writing support and contain an extensive discussion of methodology. Unlike Torrance *et al.* (1993, see subsection 4.1.3 in this chapter), however, these studies report on an individual writing support initiative each, embedded into a content module rather than presented as an independent course about writing.

Caffarella and Barnett (2000) report that feedback is an essential part of learning to write at doctoral level, yet it is rarely discussed in doctoral students’ development as thesis writers. Constructive critique received from peers and academics or given to peers enables doctoral students to develop not only an increased awareness of the particularities of academic writing but also “[their] perception of [themselves] as a scholarly writer” (p. 46). Caffarella and Barnett’s findings were derived from a group of

professional doctoral students at a university in the US; the students were enrolled in or had completed a semester-long programme (the Scholarly Writing Project). The project was integrated into a core course on educational leadership and consisted of three components: content, process and critique. The students were required to submit two drafts of a paper and the final version, with feedback given and received on each of the three assignments. Personal investment in writing and its relationship to identity work was repeatedly highlighted in the data, both in the individual comments (written and oral) elicited from students and in the focus group interviews with five student cohorts (the interviews were complemented by questionnaires in the case of students unable to attend the focus groups).

Topping *et al.* (2000) studied “pairwise and reciprocal qualitative formative peer assessment in the area of academic writing” (p. 152) in a professional postgraduate course in Education in the UK context. The papers which the students submitted for assessment at the end of the second term were marked by tutors and then given to the students for the peer feedback exercise. The students were told all the papers had been awarded a “pass”; however, they did not have access to the tutor’s feedback until the peer assessment exercise had been completed. Peer assessment was embedded into the course and no writing specialists were involved. Before the deadline for the peer assessment exercise, the students had the opportunity to critique, as a group, one of the course director’s submissions to a peer reviewed journal. Overall, Topping *et al.* found that, while peer feedback was minimal in the “Originality” and “Criticality” categories (assessment guidelines had been provided), it spontaneously stimulated self-assessment.

Topping *et al.* highlight the formative potential of peer feedback but draw attention to the importance of graduated training in giving feedback and interpreting comments on written work. They also note that feedback on drafts rather than solely on the final version of an assignment would be likely to have a greater impact on students’ development as writers. In this respect, their research comes to confirm the pedagogic value of the writing support initiative discussed in Caffarella and Barnett (2000).

The studies by Caffarella and Barnett and Topping *et al.* do not include formal instruction on rhetorical aspects of textualisation. Writing is conceptualised as a discipline-specific process of knowledge production, and textualisation strategies appear to be viewed as an aspect with which students are already familiar or are expected to internalise by consulting the guidelines available in the course handbook. A different perspective on textualisation is available in two studies from the Australian context, Aitchison (2003) and Nelson and San Miguel (2003), which offer descriptions of the

authors' own practice as writing support specialists. Aitchison (2003) discusses thesis writing circles, in which students share their own writing with peers, whereas Nelson and San Miguel's (2003) initiative is centred on text-based discourse analysis. Both studies pay explicit attention to text construction and foreground the pedagogic underpinning of the courses on which they report.

The thesis writing circles described by Aitchison (2003) "highlight the value of the social context of learning" (p. 109). They draw on the notion of peer support and review and contribute to thesis construction, a process which is seen as "embedded in a highly contextualised cultural milieu determined by the participants of the discourse community" (p. 99). In contrast to the two studies detailed above, feedback was not related to assessment. The following definition of writing groups is offered.

Writing groups well fit the notion of a site for collective knowledge production since they consist of individuals who come together specifically because the learning and the creation of meaning are embedded in social discourse. And further, where the group includes more capable peers and experts such social interaction provides the opportunity for participants to extend their knowledge to discover their potential developmental level or 'zone of proximal development' as described by Vygotsky (Bee Tin, 2003).

Writing groups not only have the potential for knowledge creation, but also for the development and exploration of academic literacies by individuals traversing a range of discourse communities. Writing groups by their very nature offer a mechanism for challenging the isolation experienced by so many candidates, especially those with differing cultural, linguistic and learning experiences. The social milieu of a group allows for the fostering of specific skills and competencies but is also a comfortable space for the growth and investigation of writer identity. When writers come together to share their texts they inevitably share much more: personal understandings, queries, support, vulnerabilities, strengths and weaknesses are all voiced within this safe environment where the goal is development not assessment.

(p. 103)

Aitchison describes two consecutive ten-week writing circles, one for Nursing doctoral students (native speakers of English), the other for Business students (non-native speakers of English). Each of the two groups had an average of 6-8 participants, and met weekly for three-hour sessions. The sessions consisted of teacher input on a list of topics determined by participants (for which they were handed a reading in the preceding session) and in-class reading of and giving feedback on student writing. At the beginning of each session, the students were also given the opportunity to look at



texts reworked from the previous week. Aitchison administered open-ended questionnaires at the beginning, middle and end of each ten-week writing circle. On the basis of student feedback and her experience as a facilitator, she notes that:

- the thesis writing circles enabled the participants to gain increased awareness of their capabilities as writers and their ability to critique their work
- thesis writing circle participants were positioned and perceived as “equal partners in learning and valued members of a community sharing in an exploration of common discourses with access to a language expert” (p. 108); peer review was an opportunity to explore “the intersections of talking-thinking-writing in a way that resonates with the work of theorists and practitioners of community-based theories of language” (p. 108)
- “this opportunity for discussion with peers allows students to explore not only textual representations of meaning but also ‘different ways of seeing’ (Hyland, 2002: 352) and being as writers and scholars” (p. 110).

Awareness of rhetorical conventions and strategies for textualising knowledge is also on the agenda of Nelson and San Miguel’s (2003) writing support initiative. The two writing support sessions on which Nelson and San Miguel report “use texts to open up ways of talking about writing issues” (p. 132). The first session entailed examining a published literature review (from a journal article). The second session focused on paragraphs from students’ own writing, followed by actual feedback given by the supervisors; for the second half of this second session, the topic was argumentation, exemplified, again, with students’ own writing, this time with supervisors’ feedback incorporated into the sample paragraphs. The students who attended the sessions were native speakers of English registered for a professional doctorate in Nursing and were working within the same general disciplinary area. Nelson and San Miguel (2003) contextualise the identity element in their study as follows:

While studies on writer identity at the postgraduate level (e.g., Casanave, 2002; Ivanic and Camps, 2001) offer valuable insights that have informed our teaching practices, such studies rarely offer practical suggestions about how to engage doctoral students in thinking through identity issues in their own writing. There is a need to illuminate issues of textual identity in ways that will make sense to students who are not familiar with linguistic theories or terminology (and in our case, to do so within the limited timeframe of a three-hour workshop). (p. 121)

The pedagogic implications of applied linguistic research were emphasized throughout the study.

In their evaluation of the workshops detailed in Nelson and San Miguel (2003), the student participants highlighted the following positive aspects:

- the use of student drafts in the workshops (“the use of text examples was great”; “it was good to see live data”);
- the impetus to think about writing in new ways (“I found the comparison of styles etc and different marker comments useful. I saw things that I had never seen before”);
- a deepening understanding of the expectations of the academy (“Very interesting to have the discussions on what was appropriate ‘academic’ style of writing. This expanded my ideas for what was possible and useful”);
- an understanding of how to write about themselves and their workplace in their research (“Discussing the use of the word ‘I’ i.e. situating self in the work ... was very good”). (p. 131)

Both Aitchison (2003) and Nelson and San Miguel (2003) adopt a single-discipline format for writing support initiatives. Aitchison (2003) highlights the extent to which disciplinary epistemologies drive concerns about writing instruction:

Understandably the topics of interest reflected the nature of research being undertaken; Nursing students were involved in more qualitative research than the Business students and therefore sought discussion on aspects such as writer’s voice and justification of methodological approaches, while the Business group’s interests were more conventional, such as wording a hypothesis and sequencing the Conclusion section. (p. 105)

Of the research available on formal writing support for doctoral students outside the supervisory relationship, the only source that focuses on humanities writing support is Starfield (2003). Similarly to Nelson and San Miguel (2003), she takes a text-based, discursal analytic approach to writing support. The thesis writing programme described in Starfield (2003) evolved from an Academic English series of language-focused sessions to a genre-based course targeted at both non-native and native speakers of English. The course is “framed within a faculty rather than a disciplinary boundary” (p. 138) and is addressed to Arts and Social Sciences doctoral students, based on a perceived commonality in rhetorical features across the two disciplinary groupings. Developing an “enhanced rhetorical consciousness” (Johns and Swales, 2002), which is

the stated overarching purpose of the course, is “seen to be part of the socialisation process of higher degree research students into the academic community” (Starfield, 2003, p. 139) and resonates with imperatives in the policy context of Australian doctoral education (Kemp, 1999).

Each session in the thesis writing programme described by Starfield (2003) consisted of input drawing on applied linguistic research in the area, an annotated text sample from an Arts or Social Sciences thesis which the students are invited to discuss and analyse in small groups with reference to the input provided, and whole-class discussions of the findings. Students who attended the programme commented that “having concrete examples and summarized strengths and weaknesses is a great way to access the necessary thesis tasks” (p. 150), and reportedly “valued the opportunity to exchange ideas and issues across disciplinary boundaries” (p. 150).

The studies reviewed in this section offered the most immediate point of comparison to the doctoral writing snapshots discussed in **Chapter 7**. They involved – predominantly – monodisciplinary groups of students and were facilitated by either a discipline academic or a writing specialist. The snapshots of thesis writing sessions in this research project were of cross-disciplinary groups convened by a discipline academic, a writing specialist, and peer students, respectively. The focus of the sessions in the studies reviewed in this section and their pedagogic format puts these sessions in Torrance *et al.*’s (1993) “generative writing course” category if taking into account their emphasis on peer feedback. In contrast to Torrance *et al.*’s generative writing course, however, Caffarella and Barnett (2000) and Topping *et al.* (2000) embedded peer feedback into a subject course, hence allowing for more complex identity work to take place in the peer review process. Aitchison (2003) combined a product-centred focus (entailing guided exploration of rhetorical aspects of expert texts) with peer feedback on students’ own texts (produced in advance of the course), whereas Nelson and San Miguel (2003) and Starfield (2003) focused on product-related aspects and favoured guided exploration rather than transmission of academic writing rules. The snapshots discussed in **Chapter 7** further complicate the Torrance *et al.* classification.

#### 4.6 Writing for publication

Sessions on writing for publication occupied an important proportion of writing support provision at the 10 universities examined in **Chapter 2**. Consequently, as well as referring to thesis writing, I discuss in this chapter the research available on writing for



publication. The studies reviewed here informed the selection of the second set of snapshots in this thesis, discussed in **Chapter 7**.

Research on the experience of writing for scholarly publication appears to favour two distinct formats: case studies of individual writers, and studies of groups of academic writers provided with writing support at specific institutions. While the case studies of individual writers in 4.6.1 involve doctoral students or academics who had recently completed a doctorate, the studies of writing groups reviewed in 4.6.2 make little or no reference to the doctoral writing context. Nevertheless they are included here for the contribution they make to understanding the dynamics of cross-disciplinary groups providing process-focused writing support.

#### 4.6.1 Case studies of individual writers

Casanave and Vandrick's (2003) stated aim in bringing together a collection of personal accounts by language educators of the experience of scholarly publication is to "help demystify" (p. 1) this activity. The recourse to narrative is justified by the belief that this form "has its own power in exemplifying the issues, and that narratives allow for understanding and connection in ways that straight exposition does not" (p. 2). The framework Casanave and Vandrick bring to understanding the practice of writing for scholarly publication is Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory. Situated learning theory sees learning as occurring through participation in a community of practice. Patterns of participation change as one evolves from peripheral to full membership in the community; peripherality carries positive connotations but, as Casanave and Vandrick underline, it is not an apolitical concept. Throughout the edited collection, emphasis is placed on participation as interaction.

Lee and Norton's (2003) "collaborative exchange between graduate student and supervisor" on the topic of scholarly publishing highlights, among other issues, the importance of audience awareness both when selecting a journal in which to publish and when writing a journal article. Bonny Norton, the supervisor, views publishing as participating in a scholarly conversation: "Whenever I choose a particular journal, I try to ensure that I am up to date with current issues in that journal and that I can link my work to existing debates." (p. 23).

Matsuda's (2003) passage from novice member of a discipline to published author entailed the following: avid reading (familiarising himself with the field and building a professional library); participating in discussions in an electronic list; developing the professional knowledge and confidence to articulate a theory; networking at

conferences; preparing seminar papers which allowed him to develop insights about a topic and gradually developing a sense of audience; and learning, from experience, “the importance of seriously engaging with – not just acknowledging – various views and of forming a balanced perspective” (p. 46).

While Lee and Norton (2003) and Matsuda (2003) are personal accounts (by two native speakers and a non-native speaker of English, respectively) of attempts to publish from within the US, Flowerdew (2000) takes up Swales’s (1990) recommendation to research the publication practices of non-native speaker scholars returning to their home countries after being awarded a PhD, and presents a case study of an academic at a Hong Kong university. “One way of conceptualising graduate education,” Flowerdew (2000, p. 131) writes, “is as the facilitation of legitimate peripheral participation for young scholars.” The concept of peripherality, however, covers not only status (novice vs expert) but also linguistic proficiency and geographical location (the latter in terms of access to disciplinary conversations). Flowerdew (2000) agrees with Lave (1998)<sup>19</sup>, on whose theory of learning he draws, that formal training and instruction are not incompatible with legitimate peripheral participation. He envisages instruction as an

opportunity for bringing together apprentice professionals to share their experiences and reflect together on their ongoing legitimate peripheral participation. In such a programme, young scholars would meet periodically to interact with their peers, receive a certain amount of formal instruction in academic writing, and be mentored by both subject and language specialists. (pp. 147-148)

Creating opportunities for interaction is called for given the highly mediated nature of writing for scholarly publication, argues Flowerdew. He references Prior’s (1998) ethnographic case study of the joint construction of meaning in academic writing and offers further evidence of mediation through his research.

Ena Lee had the opportunity to put to her doctoral supervisor questions about writing that both she and her colleagues had about the publication process. Matsuda received informal, indirect support from the other participants in the scholarly conversation to which he attempted to contribute; crafting an authorial voice in his case took place throughout the process of doctoral research rather than once his research had been completed. The young scholar in Flowerdew’s study received feedback from the anonymous reviewers of the paper he submitted for publication. The themes of support

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<sup>19</sup> Flowerdew may in fact be referring to Wenger (1998) rather than Lave (1998).

and interaction illustrated above are explored further in the following subsection, which examines studies of writing groups.

#### 4.6.2 Writing groups

A second strand of research on academics' experience of writing for publication focuses on writing support interventions in specific institutional contexts. The writing support sessions for doctoral students documented in the present research (see **Chapter 7**) bring together students from a variety of humanities disciplines. They are not writing-enhanced content-based sessions and they focus on writing processes and practices. While non-native English speaker students are invited to take part, EAP<sup>20</sup> provision is not a component of these sessions. "Writing for publication" interventions reported in the literature summarised below approximate most closely the format of these writing support sessions.

McGrail *et al.* (2006) provide a review of published literature on writing support initiatives aimed at increasing the publication profiles of academic staff. They identified three types of intervention: (a) writing support groups, (b) structured writing courses and (c) provision of a writing coach. Structured writing courses were found beneficial when the material was presented over a longer period of time (as opposed to a single-day writing course) and involved participants producing their own writing. All three types of writing support had a positive impact on publication rates, with short-term didactic writing courses being the least effective. Multidiscipline writing support groups were noted to be particularly useful with regard to helping participants improve the clarity of their writing. As well as looking at impact on productivity, McGrail *et al.* noted the positive effect that the interventions had on writing knowledge and skills (a perceived lack of skills was associated with lack of confidence in writing), on psychosocial outcomes (derived from having access to a supportive environment), and on other academic activity (supporting other forms of writing such as applications for grants, conference papers and abstracts or creating writing partnerships).

McGrail's *et al.*'s overview of published work on writing support interventions confirms the potential such interventions have in reframing writing as a rewarding professional activity and as an essential component of scholarly interaction. Their synthesis of writing support interventions reveals the multiplicity of formats such support can adopt. In the remainder of this section I will look in more detail at three studies of writing support interventions (Morss and Murray, 2001; Grant and Knowles,

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<sup>20</sup> English for Academic Purposes courses for non-native speakers of English.



2000; Lee and Boud, 2003) which took place over an extended period of time, involved participants examining each other's writing, and were written up for publication by the programme convenors.

Morss and Murray (2001) report on a six-month programme, *Writing for Publication*, held at Queen Mary University College with staff who had various publication profiles. Although the programme had the explicit purpose of increasing staff publication output, and consequently incorporated the notion of transferable skills deplored in current literature on academic literacies, it also allowed ample scope for participant reflection on the process of writing and on their real writing contexts. The participants' declared drive to develop the "feasible strategies" (p. 38) that would allow them to enhance their scholarly writing profiles (which may, outside the academic literacies framework, be interpreted as a desire to accumulate the transferable skills mentioned above) was channelled by the programme organisers through a series of awareness-raising activities, towards an enhanced understanding of what the process of writing, in each individual context, entails.

Morss and Murray (2001) highlight the importance of creating a congenial research culture which would support writing at the level of process, would be flexible enough to accommodate writing which produces new knowledge configurations, and would recognise the various stages through which a writer passes in order to achieve a confident academic voice. Creating such a culture is inextricably linked with the issue of space.

Space (literal and metaphorical) is a recurrent theme in literature about initiatives on training/enabling academics to write. Grant and Knowles (2000) report two such initiatives, one in Australia and one in New Zealand, aimed specifically at women academics, to offer support and guidance in the process of writing for scholarly publication. In the two cases reported by Grant and Knowles, space translated into bringing writing groups together in country retreats (the first case) or the cafeteria (the second case). The first initiative discussed, Grant's one-week rural retreat, was structured as follows:

After a shared meal and introductions, we negotiated the retreat programme which comprised a mixture of workshops (one each day, after lunch, on topics agreed by the group), seminars of work-in-progress (two each evening), and a large amount of quiet writing time. (p. 11)

The participants in Knowles' project, on the other hand, met in the campus coffee shop fortnightly. They were given a "how to" guide on writing for publication and a stipend they could use either to buy books or to cover assistance costs. Only the participants in the second project succeeded in completing, by the end of the programme, a piece of writing they had intended for publication. The two writing developers drew on the traditions of composition and creative writing when setting up the writing groups. Grant and Knowles found, from the participants in their writing groups, that participating in the group had the following benefits: increased motivation; a sense of community; a greater degree of confidence in sharing writing with others; and more confidence in oneself as an academic writer. They also noted that "talking about aspects of the writing process whilst in the midst of writing feeds the process" (p. 16).

Lee and Boud (2003), the authors of the third study on which this section focuses, describe and analyse two writing groups which they initiated at their university, one aimed at "new researchers", the other to provide a supportive environment for already published authors. They "extract, from the practices of the writing groups, a set of principles for successful development which might be generalised to other local sites of practice" (p. 193). The principles are underpinned by three major themes: "mutuality", "normal business", "identity and desire". *Mutuality* refers to developing "rich peer relationships" (p. 194); "a significant distinguishing feature of the writing groups," they note, "was that every member took a turn at every one of the roles available within the groups" (p. 194). Equally important was developing a language for describing the process of writing in the initial phase of the groups' operation. Reciprocation and engagement occurred in spite of differences in disciplinary background and experience of writing for publication. The groups' stated aim was to "assist a writer to position themselves within their own writing, within the text and within the particular community of readers to whom the text was addressed" (p. 195).

The theme label *normal business* was chosen by Lee and Boud (2003) to highlight the importance of building writing support into everyday academic practice, "into the ways in which the organisation governs itself, organises itself and plans for its future" (p. 195). The third theme, *identity and desire*, relates to productive investment in the changes taking place in the new higher education policy environment.

The writing groups set up by Lee and Boud were intended – and perceived by participants – as enabling and facilitative. The groups' successful functioning was due to the mix of skills, experiences and interests that the convenors and participants brought with them. It was also due to the balancing of individual and collective

aspirations with policy priorities, without subordinating the former to the latter. Ultimately, however, as Lee and Boud point out, “all workplaces are, of course, ‘atypical’; it is only through acceptance of this and the contextualising of the practice of academic development that it can become meaningful and relate to those it is designed to benefit” (2003, p. 199).

This thesis takes up Lee and Boud’s (2003) call for attention to the highly contextualised nature of writing support, not only from the viewpoint of the institutional context in which writing support is embedded, but also from the viewpoint of the pedagogic discourse/s and debates on which writing support provision draws. Hence the following (penultimate) section, which juxtaposes key voices in scholarly conversations about the teaching and learning of academic writing.

#### **4.7 Conceptualising support for academic writing: UK, European, and US debates**

In my analysis of fieldwork data on writing support in **Chapter 7** I identify conceptualisations of writing and pedagogic framings of writing development as instantiated in current writing support provision. The three thesis-writing snapshots and the three writing for publication snapshots provide evidence of a range of pedagogic assumptions about the place and nature of writing support in humanities doctoral research. This thesis looks at conceptualisations of writing and of writing support as they inform, overtly or implicitly, the pedagogic approaches taken.

So far, this chapter has looked at texts, individual writers, supervisors, the interaction in writing support groups. Below I summarise overarching models of writing support. I begin by revisiting writing on UK academic literacies which were introduced at the start of this chapter as a point of reference for the research. I then refer to the self-reflexive pedagogies put forward by two authors with experience of teaching in the UK higher education context. A “European” model comes next – as synthesized by Björk *et al.* (2003). What is labelled here a European model is derived from experiences of teaching and learning academic writing in English outside the Anglophone context. The fourth model discussed is the socioliterate approach put forward by Ann Johns. Prior’s sociohistoric view of writing is included here, followed by a synthesis of insights from the “writing across the curriculum” and “writing in the disciplines” movements in the US. In line with the social constructivist view of learning taken in this thesis, pedagogies are understood to be context-specific. By context I mean both the level at which writing is produced and the national institutional context in which doctoral writing develops (e.g., US doctoral programmes include a taught component; some



European universities use English as a medium of instruction but doctoral students have experience of academic writing in other languages and of following different genre expectations). Additionally, the groups of students participating in formal writing support courses in the UK are highly heterogeneous in terms of the home discipline of the participants, in contrast to the situations described in the studies reviewed in section 4.5. The overarching models included below served as useful points of reference in abstracting relevant pedagogic features of formal writing support from the data presented in **Chapter 7**.

#### 4.7.1 UK Academic literacies

The strength of the academic literacies approach lies in that it examines “student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation” (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 159) and this makes it a valuable framework for understanding the way in which students negotiate various disciplinary discourses in their research. The project for which Lea and Street adopted the academic literacies framework as a starting point examined the contrasting views of lecturers and students with regard to what constitutes a successful piece of student academic writing. The interviews carried out with tutors, students and learning support staff led them to reflect on the inadequacy of the traditional division of academic disciplines into three main areas – humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Negotiating different disciplines (“course switching”) was complicated by different tutor expectations and by the lack of agreement over the meaning of descriptive tools available (“critically analyse”, “evaluate”, “reach a synthesis”, p. 163).

Lea and Street’s “academic literacies” is primarily a research framework for academic writing; the pedagogic implications of academic literacies are discussed in Lillis (2006) and Lea (2004). Lillis (2006) discusses the pedagogic enactment of the academic literacies framework and puts forward a four-tier model of participatory dialogue; on the basis of this, she argues, “students’ participation in current dominant practices in higher education is ensured and [...] students are provided with opportunities for challenging such practices” (p. 44). Lillis exemplifies, with the help of transcripts, the four types of student-writer/tutor dialogue:

- tutor-directive dialogue about the “rules of the game” of academic literacy, based on cued elicitation and reconstructive paraphrasing techniques

- tutor-directive dialogue aimed at unpacking linguistic features (e.g., word meaning and the various functions of logical connectors)
- collaborative dialogue for bringing to the foreground the student-writer's investment in the argumentation
- talkback dialogue, "the space where the student writer can say what she likes and doesn't like about the conventions she is expected to make meaning within" (p. 42).

The examples are derived from dialogues with non-traditional (undergraduate) students; however, features built into the model, such as an awareness of writing as text vs writing as process, the recognition of the power relationships in student/tutor interaction, and the allowance made for various roles afforded to the student in academic literacies practices justify its application to doctoral writing as well.

The implications of academic literacies research for course design are also addressed by Lea (2004). Academic literacies, Lea points out, has tended to focus on non-traditional students and assignment writing; nonetheless, its agenda may lead to pedagogic insights useful to "courses based on a complex mix of disciplinary conventions and knowledge bases" (p. 743). Lea lists several principles for course design which, she argues, help create a pedagogic space into which students "are drawn [...] as participants in the construction of knowledge" (p. 754). At the same time, she recognizes the limitations imposed by institutional procedures and practices on the implementation of academic literacies' concerns with the relationship between writing and epistemology. Five of the principles listed have an immediate resonance for writing at the doctoral level.

- Takes account of students' present and previous literacy practices.
- Acknowledges that texts do more than represent knowledge.
- Attempts to create spaces for exploration of different meanings and understandings by all course participants.
- Recognizes and builds upon issues of identity and how these are implicated in the creation of texts.
- Rather than trying to acculturate students into a discipline, attempts to see students as engaged participants in the practices and texts which they encounter during their study of the course. (p. 744)

#### 4.7.2 Self-reflexive pedagogies

Burke and Hermerschmidt (2005) argue in favour of self-reflexive pedagogies of academic writing, which position teachers of academic writing as “‘real’ academics” and students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of pre-packaged knowledge. Burke and Hermerschmidt’s approach is framed by the concern, in New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; Lea and Street, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Lea and Street, 2000; Lillis, 2001; Street, 2001), with the institutional context of academic writing practices, and by poststructural feminist models of engagement with the relationship between self and discourses. The social and cultural embeddedness of academic writing practices (from the viewpoints of research, teaching and learning) is highlighted:

Pedagogic processes are always tied to epistemologies, that is, what can be known and what counts as knowledge, whether conscious or not, and involve the making of meaning rather than the transmission of knowledge. (p. 348)

Viewing writing from a social practice perspective mitigates against an uncritical framing of the relationship between writing and research. Published, scholarly research which postgraduate students consult, as well as student handbook advice or “how to” guides often

[do] not account for the connection between epistemology and research practices. This may leave students to believe that research is a linear, smooth, simple set of steps and stages. More importantly, this may leave students unaware of the implications of the decisions they make with regard to methodology and methods. Methods are often understood as ‘packages’ that can be picked ‘off the shelf’. The same goes with theoretical frameworks, which can sometimes be misunderstood by students to be ready-made packages that they simply select and then apply to sets of data. This limits students to certain theoretical frameworks and restricts the kinds of questions they can ask. This also leads to anxiety, when students think that they have not found the right ‘theory’ that matches their questions. These misconceptions, left unexplored, contribute to a lack of awareness of the processes involved in drawing on specific theoretical and epistemological frameworks and how those evolve in the course of research and writing. (Burke and Hermerschmidt, 2005, p. 357)

Lastly, adopting a self-reflexive pedagogy entails tutors examining their own writing practices and highlighting the value-laden nature of language in academic prose. One example that Burke and Hermerschmidt offer in this respect consists of replacing “on



the one hand” and “on the other” with “however” and “moreover”, in order to “avoid setting up a simplistic binary opposition” (p. 358).

#### 4.7.3 European models of writing pedagogy

The editors of a collection on the teaching of academic writing in European higher education (Björk *et al.*, 2003) identify three distinct pedagogic models: firstly, a text-focused model, which revolves around templates and generic conventions and is delivered to large classes; secondly, a writer-focused model, which involves contact between student and tutor and places emphasis on writer style, learning diaries and process-related aspects of writing (writer’s block, brainstorming, clustering, free-writing); and, thirdly, a pedagogy focused on the discourse community, which sees writing as a form of disciplinary socialisation and relies on writing tutors, team-teaching with subject specialists and on peer review groups. The first two models, Björk *et al.* note, posit the writing tutor as an “expert”, whereas the discourse-focused (or “integration” model) “follows the concept of academic socialisation into discourse communities, initiating a discipline-specific view of what needs to be taught and who may teach it” (p. 11).

What unites the contributions to Björk *et al.*’s (2003) edited collection is the reference to Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987) work on composition, more specifically, to the distinction between writer-centred and reader-based writing, the latter viewed as the “goal of any teacher of writing” (p. 13). Textual development that takes the audience into account is particularly relevant at the doctoral level where knowledge-transforming takes precedence over knowledge-telling. Audience awareness and constructing reader-based prose is an integral feature of the discourse-community-focused pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue and interaction. This is not to say that the third model is qualitatively superior to the other two, but that the three models should be integrated into a programme of support after a careful consideration of aims and resources.

The models outlined in Björk *et al.* (2003) to a certain extent are filtered through the perspective and role of the writing specialist. The first model appears to assume that there is a generic set of academic writing conventions that can be transmitted to a disciplinary heterogeneous audience. The second model shifts the emphasis onto individual writing processes and expression but preserves the role of the writing specialist as the expert who can advise on writing strategies and techniques that improve writing production. The third model displaces the writing specialist from an expert role, and conceptualises writing pedagogy not as something that is taken into the classroom

but as something that is borne out of interaction among the writing specialist, the subject specialist and the student. The process of writing, in this third model, is no longer an individual activity but a sheltered form of participation in a disciplinary conversation, in which the writing specialist mediates between the subject specialist who possesses tacit knowledge about her discipline's discursive practices and the student who is expected to acquire a greater degree of writing expertise.

#### 4.7.4 A socioliterate approach to academic literacies

Johns (1997) advocates a socioliterate approach to developing academic literacies and integrates the elements of literacy theory she adopts with pedagogic concerns. The elements she lists are: (a) the nature of acquisition; (b) the learner's role in the acquisition process; (c) the teacher-expert's role; (d) the nature of language and texts. These four components underpin Johns's commentaries on the arguments about "the nature, values and practices in general, expository academic prose" (p. 58) summarised from a range of key sources on academic discourse. Two of these arguments place membership in a discourse community centre-stage:

7. Texts should display a vision of reality shared by members of the particular discourse community to which the text is addressed (or the particular faculty member who made the assignment). (p. 61)

10. Texts should comply with the genre requirements of the community or classroom. (p. 63)

With reference to the first argument selected above, Johns (1997) comments that "views of reality are often implicit, unacknowledged by the faculty themselves and are not revealed to students" (p. 61). Syllabus design, particularly in the US context with which Johns is familiar, focuses on content and pays little attention to overtly signalling the "views of reality" or "ways of being" that underpin knowledge-making in any given discipline (p. 61). In contrast to discipline-specific academics, Johns notes, "we literacy faculty are often most interested in processes and understandings, in developing students' metacognition and metalanguages" (p. 61). Genre knowledge, the focus of argument 10, is again expected to be part of students' tacitly acquired knowledge, through unmediated exposure to a range of "good examples".

#### 4.7.5 Prior's sociohistoric approach

Prior proposes a sociohistoric approach to literate activity in the context of graduate education. His model of academic writing is indebted to Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of learning as participation in communities of practice, as well as to Cole and Engestrom's (1993) activity theory. "Literate activity," Prior writes, "is not only a process whereby texts are produced, exchanged and used, but also part of a continuous sociohistoric process in which persons, artifacts, practices, institutions and communities are being formed and reformed" (p. 139) ("Literate activity, in this sense, is not located *in* acts of reading and writing, but *as* cultural forms of life saturated with textuality, that is strongly motivated and mediated by texts", p. 138).

This conceptualisation has notable explanatory power (in the context of the present research) because it allows the researcher to construct a three-dimensional image of writing and disciplinary enculturation taking place in graduate programmes, rather than, in Prior's words, "freeze the dynamics and flatten out the diversity of that situated activity" (p. 68). Starting from a view of activity systems as perspectival (Cole and Engestrom, 1993; Engestrom, 1993), heterogeneous, layered ("contain[ing] sediments of earlier historical modes as well as buds or shoots of its possible future", Engestrom, 1993, p. 68), laminated<sup>21</sup> (Goffman, 1981) and embedded in a context made up of "dynamic configurations of foregrounded and backgrounded elements" (following Goodwin and Duranti, 1992), Prior proceeds to analyse the various activity footings connected with writing in the taught/MA component of graduate education in a US university.

The complex lamination of activity footings is apparent in students' varied understandings of what a writing task entails. Prior notes that discussion about course assignments both clarified task requirements and made the task more ambiguous by introducing task representations which students shared only partially. He identified mismatch at the level of "intersubjective representations of texts (and task requirements)" (p. 85). A view of literate activity as a "laminated array of functional systems" (p. 95) also accounts for the diversity of the ways in which graduate students negotiate the demands of the disciplinary communities of practice they aim to enter. Prior notes: "Observation would allow me to examine ways that the students' writing and the professor's responses were being shaped by classroom contexts."

The view of the social that Prior puts forward entails a conceptualisation of literate activity as historical (thus heterogeneous), concrete ("language only lives in

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<sup>21</sup> Multilayered, comprised of multiple, coexisting activities, some of which are foregrounded.



chains of situated utterances”, p. 13), mediated (relying on externalization and co-action), laminated, dynamic and co-evolving. “Dialogic, socio-historic theories,” Prior points out, “suggest seeing activity as the situated and distributed weaving and unweaving of personal, interpersonal, institutional and socio-cultural histories into functional systems that are open and perspectival, durable and fleeting” (p. 14). Commonality and regularities in academic discourse, from such a perspective, would thus involve identifying centripetal forces and quasi-sharedness rather than fixed and decontextualised structuralist categories and hierarchies.

#### 4.7.6 US WAC and WID

It has been argued, by US academic writing specialists, that academic writing should not be taught and thought of outside the discipline which requires it. This applies both to skillfully deploying the required conventions in one’s writing and to engaging with disciplinary agendas. These two practices count as distinct but not necessarily opposing modes of participation in an academic community and this distinction has been incorporated into two orientations to academic writing, *writing across the Curriculum* (WAC) and *writing in the disciplines* (WID), whose underlying principles are briefly described below.

*Writing across the Curriculum*, according to Russell (1991), is not a homogeneous trend but is itself a “collection of often-conflicted approaches” (1991, p. 307) to the teaching of academic writing, linked by the recognition that writing and content learning in academia are fundamentally interconnected. WAC acknowledges, but does not focus on disciplinary differences; it brings academic conventions and genres to the fore.

When referring to disciplinary content, however, one might understand not only the accumulation of knowledge, but also the (productive and transformative) engagement with that knowledge, which forms the necessary basis for the perpetuation and redefinition of the coordinates of a discipline. Students are seen not only as apprentices to be initiated into the discursive practices of a discipline but also as potential reformers of disciplinary discourses. These key themes, disciplines as communities of practice, writing as learning, and the re-formation of disciplinary discourses, surface in the stance on academic writing promoted by Cornell’s Knight Institute of Writing in the Disciplines. Their WID programme, which produced a volume on *Writing and Revising the Disciplines* (2002) and the subsequent, more

pedagogically oriented *Local Knowledges, Local Practices* (2003), is built on the principle of dialogue,

whether the internal dialogue that constitutes writing as a self-reflexive activity, and which I've meant to imply by the idea of "Writing Writing"; the ongoing dialogues – typically more fractured and unsettled than they may appear from the outside – that go on within the disciplines; or the dialogues that take place, manifestly and often in more subterranean ways, between and among disciplines and across various discourse communities. (Monroe, 2003, pp. 256-257)

To a certain extent, WAC and WID are centred on undergraduate students and the way in which these students, through writing, appropriate the knowledge base of a discipline in a way that is personally meaningful and relevant. WAC, more than WID, has to do with combining several types of writing (expository prose, argumentative essays, free writing and diaries) with the purpose of enhancing the learning and understanding of disciplinary content. On the other hand, WID focuses attention more on the distinctiveness of writing conventions and strategies in each discipline and perhaps places emphasis less on individual student learning than on discursive specificities.

Cornell University's model of writing in the disciplines focuses on undergraduates' learning how to write. The *Writing and Revising the Disciplines* edited collection, however, has a wider brief:

[it] marks an attempt to make explicit and further increase this level of self-awareness, at Cornell and elsewhere, about the diverse writing practices in which scholars engage across the disciplines, often, if not typically, without manifest awareness of the discursive frames, conventions and constraints that shape the writing fields, or fields of writing, each discipline necessarily cultivates. (Monroe, 2002, p. 5)

The contributors to the collection were invited to describe, among other things, their entry to the field of writing they represent, what they would want undergraduates, graduate students or colleagues to understand about the "current state of [the] discipline", or changes in writing practices across the lifespan of the discipline.

Culler's contribution to the *Writing and Revising the Disciplines* collection, on writing in the discipline of English, does not directly address the issue of enculturating graduates into the practices and processes of writing literary criticism; his account starts with an encounter, in his first year at university, with two texts of criticism which define

a shift in disciplinary knowledge-making practices. Individual engagement with texts appears to be central to Culler's outlook on learning how to write criticism ("one's sense of what it is to work in a particular field derives from possibilities enacted in key texts", p. 131) and graduate experience is glossed over in the account. Nevertheless, Culler's reflection on writing practices in the discipline can usefully inform a pedagogy of writing support sensitive to changes in patterns of participation in the discipline through writing. This is not only because Culler (2002) unpacks the relationship between writing and knowledge-making from an insider's perspective (e.g., "For the New Criticism, poems are ultimately about poetry or sense-making, and a strategy of critical writing is to work out what the poem says about poetry and interpretation.", p. 142) but also because, through his choice of texts for discussion, he points to the plurality of ways of writing within the discipline and to the ways in which rhetorical choices serve to create consensus and pre-empt critique (e.g., "[Brooks] is bending over backward to fit into a critical consensus, to avoid appearing to deny anything about the meaning of a poem that other critics might think, while nevertheless opening the possibility of a slight ambiguity that he hopes others will find plausible.", p. 135).

#### **4.8 Conclusions**

My focus on humanities doctoral students and my concern with writing as discipline-specific (rather than as a set of generic decontextualised skills) prompted me to look at descriptions of academic writing in the Humanities in order to find out whether textual and linguistic analyses confirm discipline specificity at various levels of discourse. Geisler (1994), in her research on writing in philosophy, shows differences in degrees of expertise (highlighted at the beginning of this chapter) and MacDonald (1994), who performs a close analysis of texts, confirms this. The literature review in particular was noted as an important source of difference. Talking of horizontal (across disciplines) and vertical (from one degree of expertise to another) differentiation, however, may give the impression that off-the-peg templates can be made available to students when, in fact, as Johns and Swales (2002) indicate, the shape of a text is determined by a mix of factors.

Section 4.2 analysed products, section 4.3 looked at writing processes, at how individual writers negotiate conventions and at how individual writing histories have an impact on thesis production. The interactions in which individual writers in the studies in section 4.3 participated were mostly between student and supervisor and between



student and writing specialist. I looked at these studies to see how individual writers learn to write and what influences thesis production.

Although my research focuses on formal writing support provision outside the supervision relationship, it was important to examine the literature on supervision in order to identify potential areas of overlap between supervision and formal support, the expectations set up by formal support, potential tensions between the discipline expert and the writing expert roles. Studies of supervising writing confirm the importance of examining writing as the performance of a scholarly identity and of looking outside the text to see how identity work impacts on thesis production. There are two different understandings of identity here: identity as a set of linguistic resources vs identity work as the process of coming to voice in academic writing. From a pedagogic viewpoint, the former would translate into equipping students with a range of linguistic strategies for varying the strength of claims and raising their language awareness, whereas the latter would entail creating a space in which students can articulate the component parts of their projects and providing feedback which students can use as a scaffold in the process of progressively developing an authoritative scholarly stance. Both approaches can be located in either the supervision context or the formal support context. The separation of supervision and formal support reflects a tension in the way the two roles – subject expert and writing expert – are conceptualised.

Studies of writing support outside the supervision relationship aired two main themes: learning about writing by providing feedback in a structured way and raising the rhetorical consciousness of course participants through guided textual analysis. Writing for publication, which is the focus of section 4.6, was discussed, in the sources reviewed, in terms of joining a disciplinary conversation, familiarisation with the procedures and conventions in academic publishing and creating a material/institutional and intellectual space for writers to share ideas and develop writing projects.

Finally, the chapter offered summaries of six key positions in debates about academic writing in general: viewing writing as inextricably linked with identity, epistemology and power, and the implications this has for teaching practices and overall course design (academic literacies); encouraging writers to become aware of their writing practices (self-reflexive pedagogies); exploring the tension between writing support and discipline-specific guidance on writing (European models, WAC and WID); replacing a view of writing as tacitly acquired with an approach to writing support which makes genre conventions explicit (the socioliterate approach); and, lastly, Prior's socioliterate approach to literate activity, which recognises the multiplicity of

activity strands which make up academic writing. These key positions are discussed in this thesis (see **Chapters 7 and 8**) with reference to support for humanities doctoral writers.

Looked at from the point of view of formal writing support, the material reviewed in this chapter invites the formulation of several guiding principles for the design of doctoral writing support interventions:

- the ideation in and rhetorical shape of doctoral writing are closely interrelated
- writing is a profoundly situated social activity and not a transferable skill
- the interaction between doctoral student and writing support provider is inflected both by the pedagogic agendas of writing support providers and by the learning agendas of doctoral students
- group dynamics in the formal writing support situation have a bearing on the extent and quality of learning
- writing support is situated in institutional contexts and at the intersection of pedagogic discourses
- both thesis writing and writing for publication involve complex identity work on the part of the writer.

**Chapter 7** explores the significance of these principles in relation to fieldwork data on humanities doctoral writing support provision and **Chapter 8** considers the way in which these principles would enhance humanities research training pedagogies.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

#### 5.1 Introduction and chapter overview

The overarching question for the present research was “How do formal/official research training cultures contribute to supporting knowledge-making and writing practices in humanities doctoral research?”. **Chapter 2** reported on the document analysis which helped identify fruitful directions for the main fieldwork component of the research. It summarised Deem and Brehony’s (2000) definition of research training cultures, identified three models of research training culture in the context of humanities doctoral study in the UK, and formulated assumptions and questions about/for an in-depth qualitative exploration of the learning designed to take place in humanities research training programmes. It also included references to methodological choices made in this research project.

The present chapter takes up and develops the discussion about methodology in **Chapter 2**. The list of research questions (5.2) and the list of data sources (5.3) in the research project open the discussion. Each data source (or, in my terms, research component, see Table 2 in this chapter) is then presented with reference to its contribution towards answering the research questions. Section 5.4 focuses on the pre-fieldwork stage. The main fieldwork component of the research (*Research component 3*) relied on case study methodology; an overview of this methodology in educational contexts is offered in section 5.5, accompanied by discussion of grounded theorising (section 5.5.2), which provided the necessary methodological glue to bring together the case and the snapshot data. Data collection in the main fieldwork component is the focus of section 5.6, whereas *Research component 4* is introduced in section 5.7. The analysis of fieldwork data is discussed in section 5.8. The use of software, issues of validity, and ethical considerations are also addressed in this chapter, in sections 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11, respectively.

The four components of the research outlined in Table 2 were defined on the basis of type of data source and context of data collection. From the viewpoint of data analysis and interpretation, each of the four components contributed to a different extent to each of the two strands of this research: “postgraduate research pedagogy” (a literature review for this



is provided in **Chapter 3**) and “doctoral writing pedagogy” (the relevant literature for this strand is reviewed in **Chapter 4**).

## 5.2 Research questions

The set of questions in Fig. 2 guided data collection and analysis.

In order to give the research design a coherent shape, it was necessary to formulate a localised definition of research training cultures (see **Chapter 2**), which helped explain on an operational level the educational processes in the field, and which guided data collection. Thus, for the purposes of the case study (Table 2, *Research component 3*), I defined a specific research training culture as constituted by and materialised in the following: the interaction among course convenors, lecturers and students; the documents accompanying this interaction and mediating between higher level research training policies and context-specific interpretations of policy guidelines; convenor and lecturer stated views on doctoral training pedagogy; and students’ meaning-making in the learning situation.

## 5.3 Data sources

As previously mentioned, this thesis is the outcome of a qualitative, exploratory educational research project. Data collection was divided into two main stages: pre-fieldwork (consisting of document analysis) and fieldwork (an empirical investigation, using ethnographic methods, of research training for humanities doctoral students). A detailed explanation of the research design and the methodological choices made is offered throughout this chapter. I also provide an overview of the data sources, so that the reader may place each component and source into the larger picture of the research. There are four empirical components in this research, as indicated in Table 2.

The presentation of the research design as consisting of four components reflects to a large extent the chronological order in which the data were collected and the organisation of the data for analytical purposes. The temporal divisions, however, were not clear-cut in all cases (see Table 2 above). The two sets of documents were examined outside the field; *Set 1* formed the starting point of the research and its analysis preceded and informed the selection of the case study setting for the main fieldwork component. Collecting and



|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| <b>OVERARCHING QUESTION FOR THE PHD</b>   |                   |
| <i>How do official/formal research training cultures support knowledge-making and writing practices at doctoral level in the Humanities in the UK?</i>  |                   |
| <b>PRE-FIELDWORK QUESTIONS</b>  |                   |
| <b>Questions for the analysis of research training handbooks</b> ( <i>Research component 1</i> )  |                   |
| How does current research training provision for humanities doctoral students interpret the Joint Skills Statement?   |                   |
| • What types of research training culture are configured by research training programmes?   | Chapter 2 (2.5.1) |
| • What place does writing have in research training programmes and what does current provision of writing support within formal research training programmes consist of?  | Chapter 2 (2.5.2) |
| • How is research training articulated with two other institutional aspects of the doctoral experience – personal development planning (PDP) processes and supervision?   | Chapter 2 (2.5.3) |
| • What discourse is used to “sell” (justify) the research training programme? What are the discourses surrounding doctoral training provision?  | Chapter 2 (2.5.4) |
| <b>Question for the analysis of “how to” guides</b> ( <i>Research component 2</i> )   |                   |
| What do the guides highlight as important for doctoral students to be aware of throughout the process of producing a PhD thesis?  | Chapter 7 (7.3)   |
| <b>FIELDWORK QUESTIONS</b>  |                   |
| <b>Questions for the case study</b> ( <i>Research component 3</i> )   |                   |
| <i>What are the dimensions of a Type 3 research training culture?</i>   | Chapter 6 (6.10)  |
| <b>Questions for the writing support sessions</b> ( <i>Research component 4</i> )   |                   |
| <i>What is the role research training plays in supporting writing (outside the supervisory relationship)?</i>   |                   |
| • What conceptualization of writing is communicated to the students in writing support sessions outside the supervision relationship?   | Chapter 7 (7.8)   |
| • On what conceptualisation of learning how to write is writing support predicated?   | Chapter 7 (7.8)   |
| • Given that the supervisor’s main role with reference to writing appears to be to offer subject expert feedback on the students’ work, what roles are associated with formal writing support providers in cross-disciplinary settings? | Chapter 7 (7.8)   |

Figure 2: Research questions



Table 2: Research components, data sources and chronology

| RESEARCH COMPONENTS   | DATA SOURCES   | CHRONOLOGY                              |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Research components 1 and 2</i><br>Pre-fieldwork (document analysis) | <i>Set 1</i><br>Analysis of existing documents from 10 HEIs across the UK (postgraduate prospectuses, research degree handbooks, research training handbooks, additional material on PDP tools and the registration process, information from the graduate school’s website.   | Before and in parallel to the fieldwork |
|   | <i>Set 2</i><br>Analysis of a series of “how to” guides on writing at the doctoral level and beyond  |   |
| <i>Research component 3</i><br>Fieldwork case study (main component)    | An empirical investigation of a year-long, faculty-based general research training course for humanities doctoral students, using qualitative research methods (observation and discussion notes, email interaction, additional document analysis)   | October 2005 – July 2006                |
| <i>Research component 4</i><br>Fieldwork “snapshots”                    | An empirical investigation of six research training sessions focused specifically on writing, in various universities across the UK, ranging from two-hour sessions to two-day series of workshops, using qualitative research methods (observation and discussion notes, email interaction, additional document analysis) | Before, during and after the case study |

analysing the documents in *Set 2* began once the writing-related findings from *Set 1* had been given clear contours, but was finalised when the fieldwork was well under way. This was not only because some of the guides went into a second edition while the fieldwork was being carried out but also because the notes and the preliminary analysis from the field had an important bearing on drawing up the final list of “how to” guides and selecting the relevant information. The main component of the fieldwork occupied the best part of an academic year (October 2005 – July 2006), while the research to which I refer as snapshots (*Research component 4*) was carried out before, during and after the main fieldwork component.

Setting the data sources in constant dialogue with one another is a fundamental principle of the design of this research and is recognised in the literature on qualitative methodology for its role in ensuring the rigour and reliability of the research. Section 5.5 looks in detail at the use of qualitative methodology in educational research (in particular the use of case studies and the principles of constructivist grounded theory). In keeping with the chronological presentation of the research, the next section prefaces the discussion on qualitative methodology with a consideration of the pre-fieldwork components, the



analysis of document sets 1 and 2. Reference is also made to the documents pertaining to the fieldwork stage.

#### **5.4 Pre-fieldwork: Document analysis**

Atkinson and Coffey (1997) argue that researchers should “give documentary data due weight and proper analytic attention” (p. 48), treating them as data in their own right rather than as secondary sources, subordinated to ethnographic-type data and resorted to for confirmation of findings or additional weight to claims. Documents, they point out, construct reality, not merely represent it; they “constitute distinctive levels of representation, with some degree of autonomy from other social constructions” (p. 55). Documents are highly intertextual and rely on what Atkinson and Coffey refer to as “the linguistic building blocks of [a] genre of academic management” (p. 54). Atkinson and Coffey are talking about departmental self-assessment, but their comment is pertinent as regards course descriptions as well. Equally importantly, researchers are invited by Atkinson and Coffey to take into account the production, circulation and consumption of documents, alongside the textual information they contain.

The two sets of documents in the pre-fieldwork part of this research were examined with a view to identifying patterns in and theoretical underpinnings of research training provision (*Set 1*) and the current know-how on pedagogies of doctoral writing (*Set 2*). As indicated above, the two sets of documents consisted of: postgraduate prospectuses, research degree handbooks, research training handbooks, additional material on PDP tools and the registration process, information from the graduate school’s website (*Set 1*) and a series of “how to” guides on writing at the doctoral level and beyond (*Set 2*). *Set 1* comprised documents in a variety of formats, aimed at a range of audiences; there was less variety in *Set 2*.

##### 5.4.1 *Set 1* Documents: The doctoral research training handbooks and related information from 10 universities across the UK

As discussed in **Chapter 2**, the content of the documents was mined for specific factual information (similar to quantitative content analysis, but with a descriptive focus) and for relationships between the themes and issues framed by the research question. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003, p. 77) locate the relationships between themes and issues within the qualitative paradigm, and L. Prior (2003, p. 122) writes that “the problem with

straightforward content analysis is that the same words and terms can be used to reference different entities". The use of the label "generic" in the *Set 1* documents is a telling example in this respect. "Generic" appeared in documents related to university-wide provision of technical skills; it was present in the AHRC's research training framework where writing was mentioned; it was also used to describe writing support provision organised at faculty-level by a humanities academic who would presumably refer, in his session, to localised strategies of constructing a humanities doctoral thesis. It was unclear whether the use of the term "generic" in the documents analysed was underpinned by an in-depth understanding of its implications or whether it was simply used as a selling point for training.

The qualitative content analysis in this project was necessarily related to considerations about the structure, rhetorical purposes and the context of the documents. The first set of documents examined in the pre-fieldwork phase contains inevitable limitations. As with other documents in organisation settings, it is unclear to what extent they represent actual practice and how much of what is said in the documents (the institutional perspective on research training) is aligned with individual academics' conceptualisation of the research process. In her monograph on the use of documents in social research, L. Prior (2003) notes that the Foucauldian knowledge/power relationship "defines how things are to be arranged, and what is to be included and excluded in the realm of what is known and what is knowable" (p. 47). In the higher education context, the relationship between policy makers, funders and practitioners has a strong bearing on the content and structure of public, auditable documents. Furthermore, there is a high degree of intertextuality among documents in educational settings: the contents of the Joint Statement issued by the Research Councils (see Appendix 1a) are evident in research training programme descriptions from individual institutions or in the various documents associated with registration and progression in doctoral research.

I examined publicly available documents only, which postgraduate students would be likely to encounter. I did not take into account "private" documents such as course reports, internal submissions for quality assurance audits, or memos from research degree committee meetings (since these would not be available to students). L. Prior shows "how documents can both mediate and structure episodes of social interaction" (2003, p. 67). The documents examined make the premises for research training provision "visible and traceable" (L. Prior, 2003, p. 87) for the intended audience and offer an excellent entry

point for an analysis concerned with the teaching and learning interaction taking place in research training programmes.

In some cases, description in the documents I examined was minimal and factual in nature (times, room numbers, point of contact and a one-line description of the session). The course descriptions were institutional interpretations of the Joint Statement ethos and categories. On the other hand, the registration documents that the students are expected to produce (project proposal and research training needs analysis document) are more strongly embedded in disciplinary frameworks of accountability (for example, what counts as a feasible PhD in history). While the Joint Statement is issued by funders and bears the seal of approval of an educational quality assurance body, the registration documents are individual examples of the way in which policy provision impacts on research practitioners. They are revealing on several levels but they also control what can and cannot be said with reference to research projects.

#### 5.4.2 Set 2 Documents: “How to” guides on doctoral writing

Of “how to” guides, Tight (2003) writes:

it would be false to dismiss the ‘how to’ genre as not research-based. On the contrary, it makes extensive use of personal experience, observation and reflection, of case studies of innovations in practice and of other published research studies. So this is a literature as worthy of study as any, and has its own stories to tell about contemporary higher education. (p. 66)

“How to” texts are continuous prose accounts which sustain a coherent authorial persona throughout the 150+ pages. Intertextuality is again a defining feature, as in the case of the course-related documents discussed in 5.4.1, though not overtly involving a relationship between higher level policy and individual practice. In the “how to” texts, I aimed to identify not descriptive, factual information (as in *Set 1*) but assumptions, values and strategies that experienced writing developers associated with humanities doctoral writing. Detailed discussion of these is available in **Chapter 7**.

#### 5.4.3 Documents collected during fieldwork

Document analysis, however, was not limited to the pre-fieldwork stage. The following documents were examined/produced while carrying out fieldwork.



- *Existing documents within the case study and snapshots:* course handbooks, course handouts, registration forms, sample registration documents, research handbook, profiles of academics involved in the training programme, feedback forms, email messages about the course (sent independently of the researcher), students' course notes.
- *Documents solicited or generated by the researcher:* fieldwork notes, email interaction between the researcher and the research participants, research participants' answers to structured lists of questions.

### 5.5 Fieldwork in educational settings: The qualitative paradigm

Deem and Brehony's (2000) definition of research training cultures, which lies at the basis of the present research, identifies the components of these cultures and captures the complexity of the interaction taking place among doctoral students from diverse disciplines within the broad disciplinary grouping of the social sciences. The findings of their research are based on interviews with both home and overseas students. My research focused on humanities doctoral students and adopted a qualitative, exploratory approach, relying on pre-fieldwork document analysis to preface the main fieldwork component.

Observing a year-long research training course (fieldwork case study, main component, see Table 2 in this chapter) was justified by the focus, in this project, on further disentangling the complexity of the cross-disciplinary interaction taking place in research training programmes in order to translate this complexity into principles for course design. Deem and Brehony (2000) was taken as a point of departure for the present research; they map out the research student experience in terms of access to cultures which support knowledge-making and they point out significant differences among groups of students in terms of degree of access to support cultures. The present research applied similar concerns to the humanities disciplinary grouping and made recourse to qualitative data to gain further insights into the dimensions of cross-disciplinary research training cultures.

Of quantitative research, Freebody (2003) writes:

Many educational researchers came to feel that research activities structured through the logics of quantification leave out lots of interesting and potentially consequential things about the phenomenon – interesting and consequential not just in terms of the concerns and understandings of

educators; but also in terms of the richness of the accounts of educators' experience. (p. 35)

While the present project is located within the qualitative paradigm, it recognises that there may be a value in quantification and aims to provide a rigorously documented basis for subsequent research that may employ quantitative methodology.

In an article on the range of research methods used in education research submissions for the RAE, Gorard *et al.* (2004) highlight a lack of methodological awareness (in both the qualitative and the quantitative camps) and illustrate this with the words of one of their respondents:

I would say the typical qualitative methodology for a project in educational research is interviews and there isn't much else there [...] I suppose, that in a sense, you wonder whether they're using that method because they think it's the best method, which it may be for some things or whether they don't know any other methods or they don't feel comfortable with or experienced enough with other methods to try using those... (Gorard *et al.*, 2004, pp. 380-81)

The present research combined a number of qualitative methods in order to document and analyse educational interaction in a natural setting. It looked at conceptualisations of training as they unfolded in the education process, not only as arising from individual participants' comments, and aimed to capture peer learning in progress.

The subsections below (5.5.1 and 5.5.2) outline the features of two qualitative methodologies and their relevance for the present research – case study (*Research component 3*) and grounded theory (*Research component 4*) – and consider the extent to which they inform the research design and the analysis of data in this project. Researcher reactivity is discussed in subsection 5.5.3 with reference to the assumptions that this researcher took into the field, whereas subsection 5.5.4 details the use of observation fieldnotes in this research.

#### 5.5.1 Case study methodology

Stenhouse (1988) defines an educational case study as a combination of methods applied to concerns “neither with social theory nor with evaluative judgement, but rather *with the understanding of educational action...*” (p. 50, emphasis added), by researchers who aim

to enrich the thinking and discourse of educators either by the development of educational theory or by refinement of prudence through the systematic and reflective documentation of evidence. (Stenhouse, 1988, p. 50)

Case studies have been widely used in educational research and have prompted methodological debates on their design and their potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of educational phenomena. Bassey (1999) sees case studies as involving single or multiple sites and as being “the study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings” (p. 47) according to the principles of “systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry” (p. 39).

General usage across the disciplines suggests that case study is fundamentally a qualitative method(ology), contrasted with experiments and surveys, though use of quantitative data within the case is accepted (Platt, 1999). Whilst in his contribution to Denzin and Lincoln’s *Strategies for Qualitative Inquiry*, Stake (1998) writes that “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of object to be studied” (p. 86), the present research operates with an understanding of case study as methodology rather than as object of interest. Emphasis, in case study research design, on the particular, the context-specific and the lived experience calls for a careful consideration of issues such as analytical validity and generalisability, as I discuss in section 5.10.

Platt (1999) identifies what she refers to as two functions of case study material: the rhetorical and the logical, without implying that they are mutually exclusive. The former entails “making the tacit visible” and accessible to a wide range of audiences. It captures both the subjective and the holistic in a setting and articulates convincingly the relationship between phenomenon and context. The logical function identifies the role of case studies in enabling the generation of hypotheses and instrumental conclusions. The attraction of case study as a methodology, she writes, lies in that it “speaks directly to the concerns of [the practitioner] audience” and thus it is accessible to them (p. 160).

With reference to the rhetorical function of case studies, Platt writes:

case study material gives aesthetic appeal by providing ‘human interest’, good stories and a more humanistic mode of presentation than that of the traditional ‘scientific’/quantitative style. (1999, p. 165)



Given that this research is intended for a dual audience (higher education researchers and research training programme convenors), it attempts to strike a balance between the two presentation modes.

Bassey (1999) implicitly incorporates these two functions (rhetorical and logical) in the following overview of what a case study involves:

An educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is:

- conducted within a localized boundary of space and time (i.e., a singularity)
  - into *interesting* aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system;
  - mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons;
  - in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers;
  - or of theoreticians who are working to these ends;
  - in such a way that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able
    - a) to explore *significant* features of the case,
    - b) to create *plausible* interpretations of what is found,
    - c) to test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations,
    - d) to construct a *worthwhile* argument or story,
    - e) to relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature,
    - f) to convey *convincingly* to an audience this argument or story,
    - g) to provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments.
- (Bassey, 1999, p. 58)

Bassey adds that “the terms ‘interesting’, ‘significant’, ‘plausible’, ‘worthwhile’ and ‘convincingly’ entail value judgements being made by the researcher” (1999, p. 58). The main fieldwork component of the present research explored a singularity (a year-long, faculty-based research training course for humanities doctoral students), which is interesting from the point of view of the insights it yields into learning (especially peer learning) at the doctoral level in cross-disciplinary environments. It relied primarily on observation methods and its purpose was to provide rigorous, research-based evidence for practitioners and policy-makers involved in training humanities doctoral students or for researchers working in this field or in cognate areas. The (a) to (g) points in Bassey’s overview are referred to throughout the thesis.

“Getting to know your case,” Gillham (2000) argues, and “getting to know the literature [...] should go along simultaneously, so that your reading and what you are turning up in your case study *interact*: they feed into each other” (p. 38, emphasis in the

original). Case study research, according to Gillham, has an “emergent character” (p. 38): the relevance of the literature becomes apparent only as the researcher enters the research context; at the same time, insights from the literature sensitize the researcher’s perceptions. Eisenhardt (2002) identifies a similar relationship between the literature and the data. For case study research which aims to build theory, Eisenhardt advocates “a priori specification of constructs”; these guide the design but may be partially discarded throughout data collection as the focus becomes clearer.

Of the three patterns of research training provision identified in **Chapter 2**, the third type (the year-long, assessed course on the nature of doctoral research) had the greatest potential to yield valuable learning about knowledge-making and writing at the doctoral level. In order for this potential to be translated into principles for designing research training, it was necessary to adopt a case study framework for this main fieldwork component (see Table 2 in this chapter); the case allowed the researcher to study intensively the potential for learning as realised in its natural setting.

While the case study format allowed the in-depth exploration of a research-training-culture-in-the-making, in a bounded setting (*Research component 3*, see **Chapter 6**), it was necessary to look beyond case study methodology to bring together the various components of the research. The snapshots of writing support sessions (see **Chapter 7**) could not successfully be integrated within the case (notwithstanding the allowance, in the methodological literature, for multi-site case studies) because they were not directly comparable to the main case. The overall purpose in setting up the snapshots was to provide a term of comparison for the writing support sessions within the main case and to explore in depth the relationship between knowledge-making and writing in humanities doctoral training programmes. The principles of grounded theory research (in its constructivist variant) provided the necessary methodological glue. The following subsection details the version of grounded theorising which informed this project.

### 5.5.2 Grounded theorising

Grounded theorising has sparked controversy in the field of educational research. Dey (2004), in his overview of approaches to grounded theory, points out that the main distinction to be made is between the underlying positivist (objectivist) epistemology in Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) work and subsequent (constructivist) developments emphasizing the role of sensitizing concepts in data analysis.

The version of grounded theorising which informed the present project was the constructivist approach favoured by Kathy Charmaz (2000; 2005; 2006). Below, I rely on the most recent published version of her work (Charmaz, 2006) to explain the place of grounded theorising in the present project.

Constructivist grounded theorising views theory as constructed through the interaction between the researcher and the data, and aims to offer “plausible accounts” rather than “verified knowledge” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132). The data collected by the researcher convey participants’ definitions of terms, situations and events. On the contrary,

An objectivist grounded theorist assumes that data represent objective facts about a knowable world. The data already exist in the world; the researcher finds them and ‘discovers’ theory from them. [...] This view assumes an external reality awaiting discovery and an unbiased observer who records facts about it. Objectivist grounded theorists believe that careful application of their methods produces theoretical understanding. (p. 131)

In constructivist grounded theorizing, research design is flexible and requires constant evaluation of “the fit between initial research interests and emerging data” (p. 49).

The role played by literature in grounded theorising is viewed differently in objectivist and constructivist approaches. While objectivists argue that literature reviews should not be carried out before data collection and that researchers should start with as few preconceptions as possible, constructivists acknowledge the value of sensitising concepts from the literature towards an understanding of the full complexity of the data. Charmaz (2006, p. 48) quotes Dey, who aptly summarises the constructivist position on literature in grounded theorising: “There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head” (Dey, 1999, p. 51). In the research project on which this thesis reports, I set the literature and the data in constant interplay throughout the process of data collection and analysis. I formulated initial sensitizing concepts (from the literature review and the analysis of document sets 1 and 2), which I took forward into the fieldwork components of this research. These are discussed in **Chapters 6 and 7** in this thesis.



### 5.5.3 The role of the researcher: Reflexivity

Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) account of ethnographic principles and practice is underpinned by a suspicion of realism and of the representational aspects of naturalist inquiry with which ethnography had been viewed as synonymous:

While realism has not been completely abandoned by most ethnographers, the idea that ethnographic accounts can represent social reality in a relatively unproblematic way has been rejected; and doubt has been thrown on the claims of scientific authority associated with realism.  
(p. 14)

Drawing attention also to the macro- and micro-politics of ethnography (from a Foucauldian standpoint), they highlight the importance of reflexivity in ethnographic research. Reflexivity involves researchers recognising the influence that their positioning may have on the way in which the research is shaped. Reflexivity, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue, must be exercised at all stages in the research and at all levels in data analysis.

Although my research is not fully ethnographic, I adopted the reflexivity principle to ensure that I recognised potential bias in my analysis of the data collected. My expectations on entering the field were not dissimilar to what Deem and Brehony (2000) record as the attitude of home students towards research training cultures: the relevance of the course for individual research projects was unclear to me. Although I was not a home student at the time, I had less of the enthusiasm Deem and Brehony note as typical of overseas research students towards research training courses. Having undertaken an MSc in research methods whose description emphasized the value of generic training, I was inclined to find value in methods training that students could immediately apply in their home disciplines and I was wary of divorcing methods from discipline-specific content. The benefits of participating in cross-disciplinary research training cultures were not (immediately) apparent to me. Consistent reflection on the preliminary findings and reiterative interrogation of students' expressed attitudes towards the course were necessary to avoid imposing these assumptions on the data.

As fieldwork progressed, achieving critical distance was occasionally difficult. As I was in the process of doctoral research on PhD students learning how to carry out research (although the participants were in a different disciplinary area), I found some sessions

relevant for my own thesis. Switching from student mode back into researcher mode was, in three of the sessions observed, something I had to remind myself to do. The degree of participation in the fieldwork had to be carefully negotiated.

Choosing to write a doctoral thesis on doctoral research training entailed a complex negotiation of my positioning as an insider-outsider to the research. I researched formal training for doctoral students in the Humanities after I had undergone training in educational research. On the one hand, my disciplinary area, my position as a researcher, and the fact that I was registered as a doctoral student at a different institution made me an outsider to the research setting. At the same time, however, I had an insider's perspective, because some of the policy documents I was engaging with (for example, the Joint Skills Statement) and the institutional processes of formal training had a direct impact on the evolution of my own doctoral research. I had an insider's perspective on the rhetoric and practices of doctoral research training. Having undergone research training, I had direct experience of the tension between seeing the doctoral research journey as a process of disciplinary enculturation, on the one hand, and focusing on acquiring transferable skills, on the other. My positioning with reference to the source of my research was both a source of insight into the learning interaction taking place in the field and a potential source of bias in the research design and analysis.

#### 5.5.4 Observation fieldnotes

The central means of data collection in the two fieldwork components of this research (*Research components 3 and 4*) was observation. While observation notes are extensively used in education research, there is a lack of consensus over their shape and purpose. Hence the present subsection, which reflects on their use in the research project on which this thesis reports.

Although a “mundane and unromantic activity” (Emerson *et al.*, 2001, p. 352), fieldnotes are central to ethnographic research. Ethnographic writing entails textual representation of a construct: the field, as Atkinson (1992) points out, is not a “pre-given natural entity” (p. 5) but the textual embodiment of the experience, necessarily limited and selective, of a researcher. Fieldnotes in this respect are replete with not only key words and phrases on the basis of which the researcher formulates answers to research questions but also “niggling exceptions, greyish half-truths” (quoted in Emerson *et al.*, 2001, p. 355). Emerson *et al.* go so far as to state that “a fieldnote corpus need have little or no overall

coherence or consistency” and that ethnographers “treat their corpus of fieldnotes as a loose collection of possibly usable materials, much of which will never be incorporated into a finished text” (p. 353).

Ethnographers differentiate among mental notes, jotted notes and fieldnotes (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) or scratch notes, fieldnotes proper and fieldnote records (Sanjek, 1990), and advise that taking notes in the field is a complex activity which must take into account the effect that jotting down notes may have on the research participants. The differences among the types of note listed above consist in the extent to which they are temporally sequential information from the field in “fractured syntax” (van Maanen, 1988) or edited, coherent full-sentence text bridging description and interpretation.

Ottenberg (1990) talks of scratch notes (handwritten notes in the field), headnotes (feelings, impressions and interpretations in the field, not written down) and fieldnotes (typed up notes to which the researcher adds information on the basis of headnotes). “So my handwritten notes,” Ottenberg writes, “are my original written text, and my typed notes are a reinterpretation of the first interpretation of what was in my head when I produced my handwritten notes” (1990, p. 148). Fieldnotes are then organised into a descriptive account which “has a comforting positivist feel to it” (p. 149), in that description and interpretation are kept apart as much as possible. Collecting data, Ottenberg points out, has a “latent emotional quality” which contradicts its “supposed objective nature” (p. 149). Editing fieldnotes outside the field responds to the need to create distance between the project and the researcher.

An important distinction with reference to edited fieldnotes arises from the conceptualisation of their status as description of observations in the field or as interpretive accounts. Van Maanen (1988), for example, talks about “realist tales” (descriptive, objective accounts), “confessional tales” (which foreground the researcher) and “impressionist tales” (which focus on drawing the reader in and enabling them to construct their own interpretation). Fieldnotes could be described as readerly, i.e., unfinished and not comprehensible in themselves (Atkinson, 1992, p. 8), whereas edited notes are full-sentence reworkings of the notes taken in the field. In the present research, editing fieldnotes followed primarily a descriptive reporting purpose, with the exception of the vignette in section 6.5.1, which aimed to capture students’ social involvement in the final session in the course, as conveyed in the after-the-session comments and email interaction.



Observation notes are accompanied in ethnography by theoretical and methodological notes (or memos, see Richardson, 1994). Lofland and Lofland (1995) recommend clearly marking these as separate, while Emerson *et al.* (1995) draw attention to the importance of reworking initial fieldnotes into increasingly more complex analytical writing. In taking account of the different categories of notes previously discussed, the present research distinguishes between fieldnotes and edited notes. Fig. 3 in this chapter provides an example of handwritten fieldnotes, edited fieldnotes with preliminary coding, and a memo from *Research component 3* (for a discussion of the use of memos in the present research, see subsection 5.8.1 in this chapter).

Having established the general principles underpinning my choice of methodology in this research, I now take each fieldwork component in turn and discuss it with reference to the collection and preliminary organisation of data (sections 5.6 and 5.7).

### **5.6 The main fieldwork component (Case study, *Research component 3*)**

The first research component (see Chapter 2) provided criteria for choosing a research training course for humanities doctoral students that would yield rich research data about research training in cross-disciplinary contexts. Analysing the data from research training handbooks also offered an organising frame for the sessions observed within the main case.

The main fieldwork component (*Research component 3*, pertaining to the “postgraduate research pedagogy” strand of the research) consisted of an empirical investigation of a year-long, faculty-based (rather than university-wide) general research training course for humanities doctoral students, using qualitative research methods (observation and discussion notes, email interaction, additional document analysis).

The course consisted of two strands: Level 1, for first-year students, and Level 2+, for students in their second year or above. Level 1 students met weekly, Level 2+ students met fortnightly. The Level 1 curriculum was pre-determined by the convenors. The Level 2+ curriculum (as indicated in the handbook and from my observation notes) was negotiated with the students; while the convenors put forward a number of doctoral context sessions, the student presentations and the doctoral content sessions were decided on the basis of speaker availability and student interest.

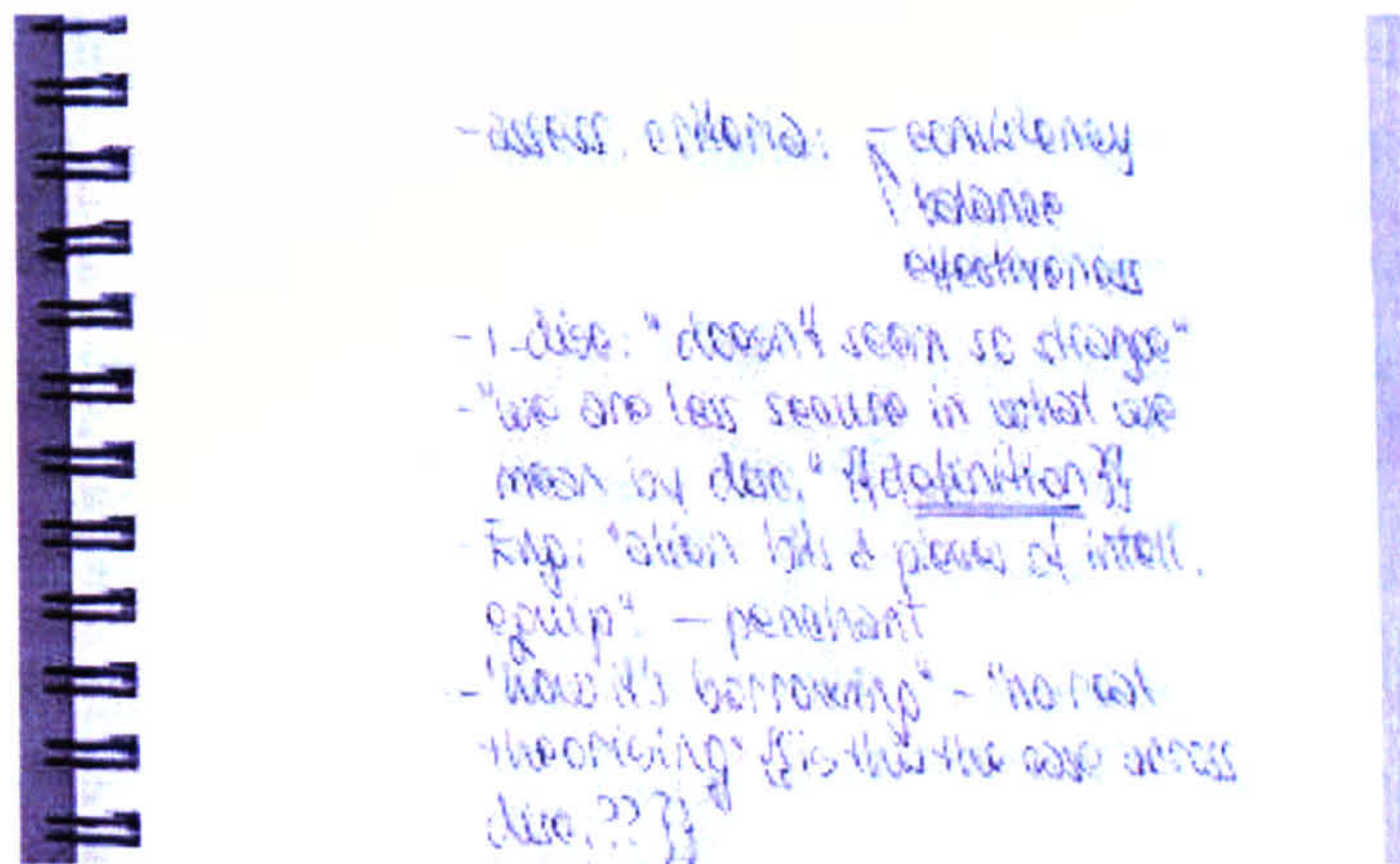
I observed approximately 70% of the sessions. Of the sessions I did not include in the research, some were left out because of their focus on purely technical matters (e.g., the library induction session) and some I could not attend due to their overlap with conferences

at which I presented work-in-progress papers. The main fieldwork component included 38 and a half hours of direct, in-class observation. Formal observation data were complemented by material solicited or generated by the researcher, such as notes on informal interaction with students outside classroom time, emails to and from convenors, lecturers and course participants, research participants' answers to structured lists of questions. The records of the main fieldwork component also included existing documents within the case and a semistructured interview with an academic who had extensive experience of convening research training programmes for humanities doctoral students (see subsection 5.4.3).

Within the main fieldwork component I documented the interaction among participants on the course. My notes included information from the convenor input part of each session; I also noted the way in which each session was structured (with rough timings), and wrote down verbatim excerpts from participants' oral contributions. I made rough notes, within double curly brackets, on possible analytic categories, questions to myself and leads to follow up on (see Fig. 3 in this chapter). As I was sitting with the group round the table, my fieldnotes were not entirely "for my eyes only". Delamont reports that she uses "a spiral-bound reporter's notebook, because the pages are quite small, so what has been written is quickly hidden by turning it over" (2002, p. 68). I carried an A5 spiral-bound notebook with hard covers (for ease of writing in sessions where the seating arrangements were less formal and I did not have access to a table) and made notes, recording information and graphically separating inferences from the description of the sessions, to the extent to which this was possible. I refer to these handwritten notes as fieldnotes. After each session I turned the notes into coherent text, storing coherent text notes from each session as a separate Word file (edited fieldnotes), and performing a preliminary analysis which involved including the following information in each file:

- "open" codes on the coherent prose description of each session (preliminary coding, see comments inserted into typed notes in Fig. 3 and the discussion of coding in section 5.8.2 in this chapter)





[The lecturer pointed out that interdisciplinary research is assessed according to three main criteria: consistency, balance, effectiveness.] In the Humanities and in the Arts interdisciplinarity "doesn't seem so strange" because "we are less secure in what we mean by discipline", whereas this might not happen in the sciences, where the boundaries are more rigidly drawn. English in particular has a penchant for utilising "alien bits and pieces of intellectual equipment" without theorising how it's borrowing from other disciplines. One has to justify very carefully what one is doing, to avoid weakening one's argument.]

Comment [L1]: Criteria for validating new knowledge.

Comment [L2]: Different understandings of disciplinarity.

Comment [L3]: "Writing up" conventions: research metalanguage.

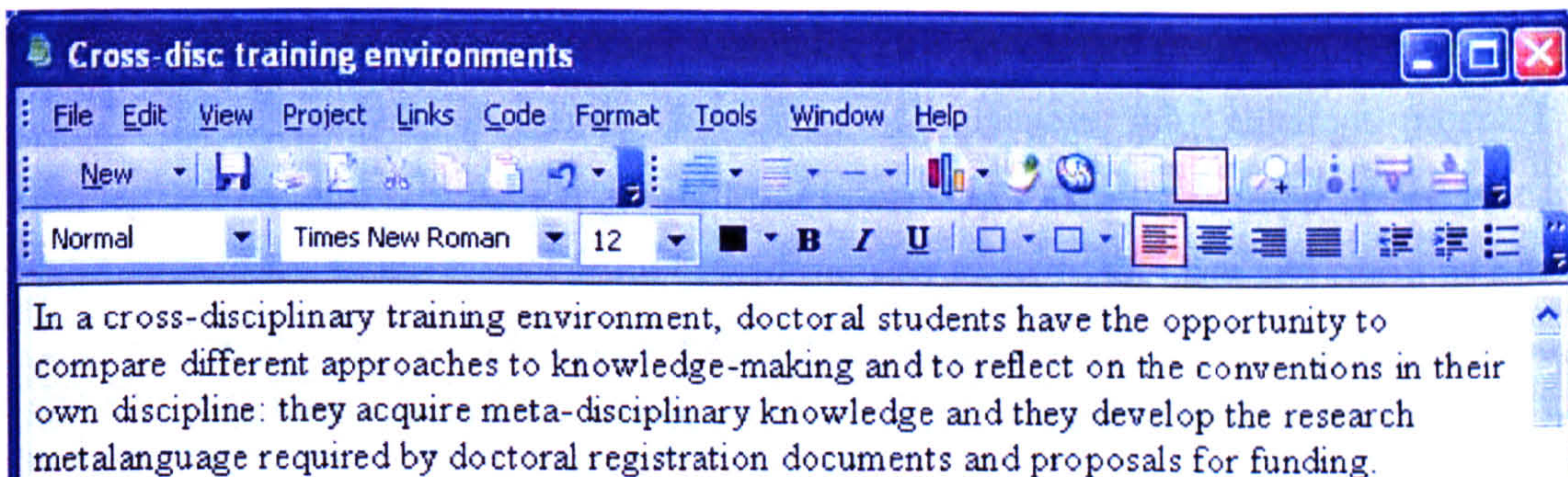


Figure 3: Fieldnotes, edited fieldnotes with preliminary coding, and NVivo memo

- follow-up questions about the content of the data, linking the data to the foreshadowed problem and identifying possible paths for subsequent inquiry
- methodological notes on the research design
- references to research literature and links to findings in other studies.

I revisited the files regularly throughout data collection and added more information where necessary (the date and time of new entries were recorded).



The Word files on each session were assigned to one of the three categories from the analysis of research training handbooks undertaken before the fieldwork (“context sessions”, “content sessions” and “student presentations”). In some cases, where the session on one particular day included both student presentations and convenor input (of context or content type), the notes were divided into separate files (e.g., “Session J” and “Session J(1)”). The observation and analytic notes on each session were accompanied by the following details: session title, name and number of students attending, number of disciplines represented by session participants, the disciplinary background of convenors and/or their position (e.g., Modern Languages, head of graduate school, librarian or IT specialist). I obtained permission to email the students attending and the session convenors for clarification or to follow up on specific issues arising from observation.

During each session, I took open, unstructured notes on A5 paper, which I then photocopied onto landscape A4 sheets, leaving the right-hand side blank. The blank side I filled after the session with coherent prose paragraphs which offered an account of what had happened in the session, on the basis of the raw fieldnotes photocopied onto the left-hand side of the sheet (see Appendix 5). I also added comments between curly brackets. In the process of turning fragments of sentences into coherent prose, I performed a preliminary selection and left out information that did not appear relevant to the research focus. Using handwriting helped me stay close to the data and recall as much information as possible from the session. Once the coherent prose account was completed, I typed it up, performed an initial coding and formulated a number of questions. These questions were designed to sharpen up observation in subsequent sessions and provide a research trail that would, in the stage of analysis proper, offer prompts for making sense of what was happening in the data.

The main fieldwork component (discussed in detail in **Chapter 6**) was part of the “postgraduate research pedagogy” strand of this research. Its relationship with other stages in the research process is visually represented in Fig. 4.



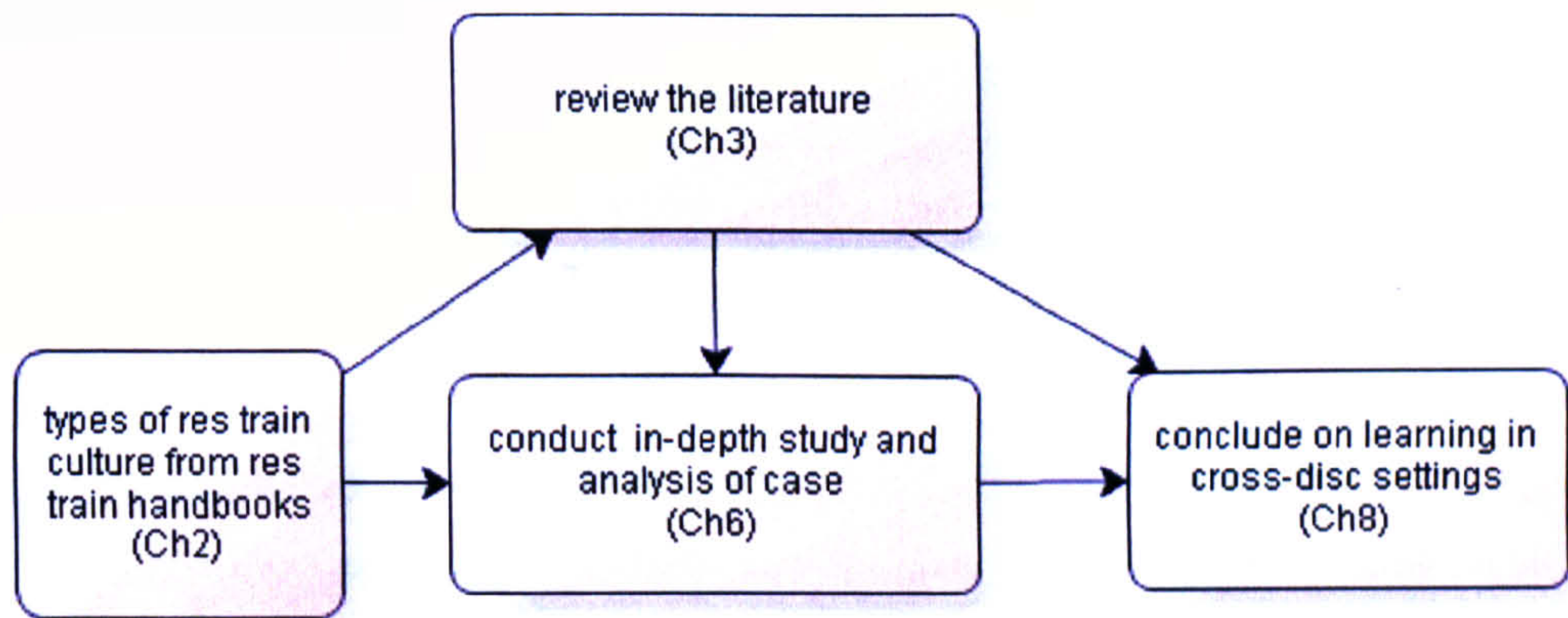


Figure 4: The “postgraduate research pedagogy” strand of the thesis (NVivo model)

Classroom observation is extensively used in teacher training, where it has two uses: one, to see live enactments of pedagogic methods, tools and techniques; two, as a means of exploring the ecology of a learning environment (Wragg, 1999). Both uses draw to a large extent on pre-determined categories, and a “technical language” shared by trainees and observer. The case study in this research (and the snapshots I describe in the following subsection) entailed a different kind of classroom observation: while the type of interaction I observed was familiar (formal mini-lectures, pairwork, examining texts), a large proportion of the course content was new. Additionally, I had to construct a language for describing what was happening. I constructed a descriptive vocabulary drawing on three resources: (1) the already existing literature on the topic; (2) words and phrases the participants used to talk about their learning; (3) words and phrases I brought with me to the research from my previous experience as a tutor, student and researcher.

### 5.7 The snapshots of doctoral writing support *(Research component 4)*

The fourth component of this research involved observation of writing support sessions, outside the supervision relationship, at a number of universities across the UK. The observation notes from the sessions and the accompanying documents are referred to as “snapshots” (see **Chapter 7** section 7.4 for a discussion of this label).

As in the main fieldwork component (see section 5.6), from each writing support session I collected the following written information: session title, abstract/stated aims (if provided before the session), handouts, the discipline background of the session convenor. During observation, I made notes on the session format (lecture, seminar, workshop), the



number and discipline backgrounds of participants, the content of the session convenor's input, the session structure, the questions asked by the students and the comments they made, the way in which students used each other as resources (the interaction among students).

The snapshots consisted of the following (not in chronological order):

- (a) a two-hour session on writing essays (the "Essay and sources" snapshot)
- (b) an account of a two-hour session on literature reviews (the "Literature review" snapshot)
- (c) a one-day series of sessions on theses as work-in-progress (the "Student initiative" snapshot)
- (d) a two-hour session on editing a journal (the "Journals" snapshot)
- (e) a two-hour session on editing scholarly monographs (the "Monographs" snapshot)
- (f) a two-day event on turning theses into published material (the "Publishing doctoral research" snapshot).

Snapshots (a) – (c) focused on doctoral writing, snapshots (d) – (f) examined the context and practices of turning thesis material into published work.

Selecting the sessions was based on a combination of criteria:

- the sessions were highly recommended as examples of best practice
- there was a balance of discipline academics, writing support specialists and people with degrees of expertise in scholarly editing among the course convenors
- the selection covered writing support for producing a range of text types
- the variety of session formats allowed the formulation of conclusions about the way in which writing is best supported in doctoral training.

Student attendance at the sessions ranged between (approximately) ten and forty.

Purposeful sampling, which guided the selection of universities in *Research component 1* (see section 2.4 in Chapter 2), was again relied on when selecting snapshots. The examination of documents on writing support provision in *Research component 1* indicated that three different types of writing are supported as part of research training:



research proposals, theses, and writing for publication. In the present research, I chose to focus on the second and third types. Thesis-writing sessions were preferred over research proposal sessions because the process of thesis-writing is substantially longer and thus the relationship between process and product underpinning the pedagogic approach taken would be more readily identifiable. The sessions on writing for publication were highlighted in the research training handbooks as new additions to the research training programme. Moreover, writing for publication being a site where doctoral students most overtly display claims to legitimate disciplinary membership, analysing sessions supporting this type of writing would yield valuable insights into suitable programmes for inducting new members into the academic community. Within each of the two categories (thesis-writing and writing for publication) I included three sessions. The sessions varied in terms of length, content, pedagogic format and convenor expertise. The rationale behind opting for variation was to gather information-rich cases that would capture the complexity of writing support approaches at doctoral level.

Within the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of this project, the snapshots were integrated as indicated in Fig. 5.

## **5.8 Data analysis**

### **5.8.1 Approaches to data analysis in case study and grounded theory research**

Analysis of the two sets of pre-fieldwork documents is discussed in **Chapters 2** and **7** respectively. This section discusses the organisation of fieldwork data and the strategies employed in data analysis. In Hammersley and Atkinson’s view, research starts with a “foreshadowed problem” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 24, a problem or a set of issues which the researcher sets out to investigate), the implications of which, they advise, should be explored and examined “with the help of whatever secondary literature is available” (p. 29). The literature review assists the researcher in translating the foreshadowed problem into a set of questions (see Fig. 2 in this chapter). In this project, the foreshadowed problem – the kind of learning taking place in cross-disciplinary humanities research training cultures – was shaped into a set of questions (see section 5.2) on the basis of the preliminary findings from document analysis and from the research literature reviewed in **Chapters 3** and **4**.



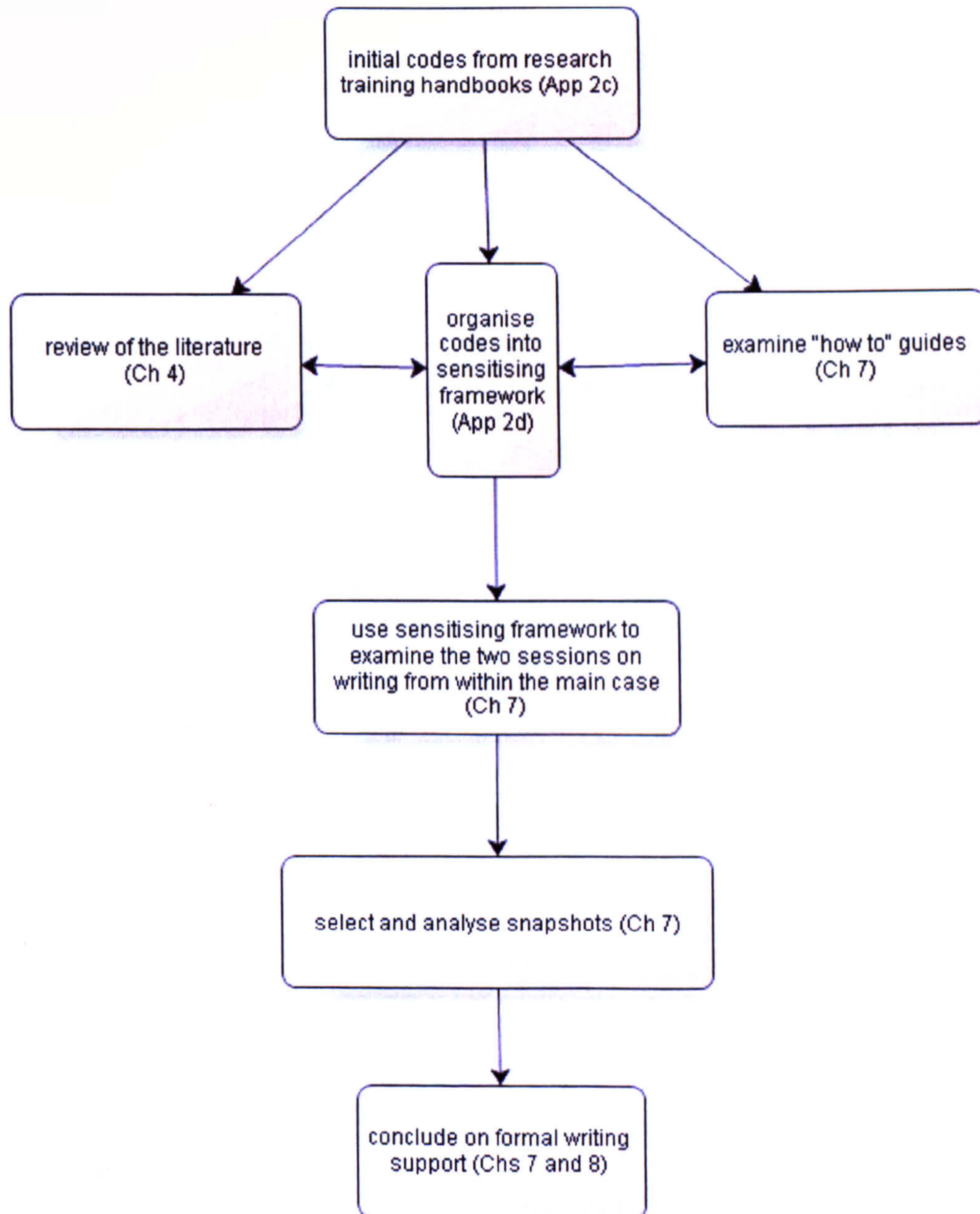


Figure 5: The “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of the thesis (NVivo model)

As indicated in section 5.5, the methodological principles adopted in this research were drawn from two distinct but complementary research traditions: theory-generating case study research, on the one hand, and constructivist grounded theorising, on the other. In this subsection, I offer a brief discussion of data analysis options in each of these two traditions.



Data analysis in theory-building case study research may rely on several strategies (Eisenhardt, 2002):

- within-case analysis, producing write-ups for each site
- searching for cross-case patterns, by (a) comparing categories or dimensions from each case; (b) examining similarities and differences between pairs of cases; or (c) looking at groups of cases divided on the basis of data source.

Recourse to these strategies makes data analysis a highly iterative process and is the necessary premise for the systematic comparison which ensures a good fit between the data and the theory. The constant comparison of data, Eisenhardt notes, leads to the sharpening of constructs (to establish construct validity) and “verifying that the emergent relationships between constructs fit with the evidence in each case” (p. 21). In contrast to quantitative researchers, who have statistical tests available to them for checking construct validity and the relevance of relationships identified, case study researchers “must judge the strength and consistency of relationships within and across cases and also fully display the evidence and procedures when the findings are published, so that readers may apply their own standards” (p. 24).<sup>22</sup>

Grounded theory coding is a recurring activity: initial, focused, axial and theoretical coding reflect increasing degrees of abstraction from raw data to theory and discipline-specific concepts. Constructivist grounded theorists perform an initial combination of word-by-word, line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding. In vivo codes “help us to preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). In vivo codes may include the following:

- Those general terms everyone ‘knows’ that flag condensed but significant meanings
- A participant’s innovative term that captures meanings or experience
- Insider shorthand terms specific to a particular group that reflect their perspective. (p. 55)

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<sup>22</sup> In line with the avowed positivist underpinning of her approach to case study research, Eisenhardt (2002) refers to consulting the existing research literature in connection with data analysis. The role of (similar or conflicting) literature is to give sharper contours to the emerging theory, enhance internal validity and yield a greater degree of generalisability. As the researcher aims to start with as few preconceptions as possible, consulting the literature in the incipient phase of the research, when formulating the question or specifying a priori constructs, is not discussed in Eisenhardt (2002).



Charmaz endorses Glaser's (1967) recommendation to code with gerunds on the grounds that, in the initial stage, this helps the researcher maintain closeness to the data, reveal the processes in the data which lie at the basis of a dynamic theory, and go beyond mere description. Initial coding is followed by focused coding – sifting through initial codes and retaining the most significant and/or frequent codes. Axial coding entails identifying the properties of a category. Initial coding fractures data; axial coding reassembles data in new ways. Strauss and Corbin (1998), the authors of a key text on grounded theorising rely on organising schemes for axial coding; Charmaz (2006) foregrounds this analytic step as problematic, arguing that resorting to an organising scheme or analytic framework “may limit what and how researchers learn about their studied worlds, and thus restricts the codes they construct” (p. 62). Theoretical coding works as a way of integrating focused codes into an “analytic story that has coherence” (p. 62). Grounded theory literature puts forward a number of coding families for theoretical coding; Charmaz points out that “Your earlier substantive analysis should indicate the kind of theoretical codes that you invoke” (2006, p. 64). The theoretical frame that enables the integration of codes and categories may remain implicit and more than one coding family may inform analysis. Charmaz advises that

If you apply theoretical concepts from your discipline at all, you must ensure that these concepts work. Several safeguards against imposing them may help. Consider these questions:

- Do these concepts help you understand what the data indicate?
- If so, how do they help?
- Can you explicate what is happening in this line or segment of data with these concepts?
- Can you adequately interpret this segment of data without these concepts? What do they add? (Charmaz, 2006, p. 68)

The interaction between data and discipline concepts is a defining feature of grounded theorising:

What you see in your data relies in part upon your prior perspectives. Rather than seeing your perspectives as truth, try to see them as representing one view among many. That way, you gain more awareness of the concepts that you employ and might impose on your data. [...] look for how [your respondents] understand their situations before you judge

their attitudes and actions through your own assumptions. Seeing the world through their eyes and understanding the logic of their experience brings you fresh insights. Afterwards, if you still enlist disciplinary terms as codes, you will use them more consciously rather than automatically. Thus, you can elect to use only those terms that fit your data. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54)

Charmaz cautions that researchers should code not only transcripts of interviews or direct observation notes but also “observations of the setting, scene and participants [...] Revealing data resides in such observations” (p. 70).

Moving up the coding hierarchy (from initial to focused to axial to theoretical coding) is achieved by grounded theorists through memo writing. Memos are short, informal analytic notes which facilitate early analysis. Codes to be elevated to the status of category are given working definitions in a memo; details are added about the processes subsumed by the code or category, conjectures to be checked in the field, comparisons with other codes or categories, empirical evidence which the code’s definition and the relationships identified, gaps in the analysis and questions which prompt further analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 82). A memo on a category would most likely consist of the following components (Charmaz, 2006, p. 92):

- define the category
- explicate the properties of the category
- specify the conditions under which the category arises, is maintained, and changes
- describe its consequences
- show how this category relates to other categories.

Writing memos, Charmaz points out, “prompts you to elaborate processes, assumptions and actions covered by your codes or categories” (p. 82). Sensitising concepts which implicitly guided data collection and analysis may be made explicit in the process of memo writing. As well as facilitating analysis, memos enable the researcher to establish the direction of subsequent data collection and provide a grounded justification for data collection choices.

In his discussion of grounded theory, Dey (2004) refers to his doctoral research project, completed before the “elaboration and formalization of coding procedures (and the disputes it generated)” (p. 85) by grounded theorists, noting that:

My own attempts at ‘coding’ data were generally in line with the grounded theory approach, but without anticipating its separation of analysis into distinct phases, its predilection for deriving categories directly from data, or its concept of a ‘core’ category. (p. 85)

A comment similar to the one made by Dey is required with reference to the current project. The present research attempted not to perform “by-the-book” grounded theorising but to use the principles of grounded theorising in a way which best captured the richness and complexity of the data.

#### 5.8.2 Data analysis in the present research

The sessions within the main fieldwork component were evenly distributed in time, which allowed for ongoing preliminary data analysis. This also meant that ongoing consultation of the research literature could be interwoven with data collection. The “snapshots” were taken before, during and after the main fieldwork component.

Throughout the thesis I refer to three different types of coding: (initial) codes, categories and themes. I used codes to organise and analyse textual data from the two pre-fieldwork research components. Codes stay close to the wording of the documents and are largely descriptive. A list of codes is available in Appendix 2d. Categories are sorted codes and involve a higher level of abstraction. They are the codes and the labels of groups of codes which were generated from the pre-fieldwork components and applied to the analysis of fieldwork data, or generated directly from the analysis of the latter. Categories are of two kinds: descriptive/organisational and interpretive. Themes are fieldwork data categories which make a substantial direct contribution to the argument put forward by the present research (and do not necessarily subsume initial codes). The three types of coding are not mutually exclusive. “Clarity of expression”, for example, is a code applied to data on writing from the research training handbooks in *Research component 1*; it is a category when listed as a “product-related aspect of writing” (see Appendix 7b) or when applied to fieldwork data; finally, I refer to “clarity of expression” as a theme in **Chapter 7**, where I explore ways in which learning design in cross-disciplinary settings purports to contribute to the development of individual writers.

At the beginning of the case study, I used the information from the module handbooks to divide the sessions into the following categories: content, context, and student presentations (as defined in **Chapter 2**, subsection 2.5.1). The three types of



session were interspersed throughout the programme. As the session notes accumulated, I looked for cross-session patterns within each of the three groups (following Eisenhardt, 2002). As well as performing within-group comparisons, I compared category properties across the three types of session. For example, the properties of the category “mediating cross-disciplinary interaction”, attached to convenor role, differed between content and student presentation sessions. In content sessions, convenors who successfully mediated across disciplinary outlooks did so in the input part of the session through extensive exposition; in student presentation sessions, the convenors did not have the opportunity to expand on pre-determined issues, and their role was to highlight potential areas of misunderstanding rather than consider them in-depth.

To give just one example of initial coding, from the first student presentation session observed within the case, I coded my notes on students’ contributions and questions, the contextualisation of the session in the research training handbook, post-session email interaction with the students as well as notes from informal chat in the session break. The list of codes included the following: ongoing dialogue (sense of continuity from one session to another); creating a student space; sharing responsibility for training; involving students in decisions about course format; uptake of control over own learning; setting up one’s own learning agenda; “safe mode” version of academic cultures; stepping into other disciplinary territories; identifying commonalities in disciplinary takes on research; locating an anchor point in the presentation; substantive feedback vs. reassuring/cheering/social feedback (see also Fig. 6).

“Locating an anchor point in the presentation” was a useful code in that it helped steer attention from learning value framed narrowly as disciplinary feedback on individual research project (i.e., the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge) to learning value framed as skill or stance. Subsequent data from the student presentations confirmed the relevance of this code: the students were able to identify anchor points in the methodology (e.g., ethnography), in the object of study (e.g., poetry), in the theoretical stance (e.g., feminism), in the delivery (e.g., using Power Point).





Figure 6: A set of nodes attached to Session A (Level 2+)

### 5.9 The use of QSR NVivo in this project

The data for the present project were analysed with the help of a qualitative analysis package software, QSR NVivo 7.

Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson (1996) contend that the available qualitative analysis software packages promote coding-and-retrieval as the orthodoxy in qualitative analysis. But there is an “increasing danger of seeing coding data segments as an analytic strategy in its own right” (online paper, no page numbers) rather than as the premise for more considered analysis and interpretation. In an article they wrote in response to Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson (1996), Lee and Fielding (1996) qualify Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson’s “assertion of a link between CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) and grounded theory” as “overdrawn”, and note that software packages have been accompanied by written accounts which “stress the need for epistemological awareness and debate in relation to software use” (online paper, no page numbers). A similar position with regard to epistemological explicitness is taken by Bringer *et al.* (2004).



Bringer *et al.*'s (2004, p. 247) discussion of "the complexities of writing about the use of QSR\*NVivo within a grounded theory study" focuses on the first author's PhD thesis and details one way in which foregrounding the relationship between the software and the methodology can enhance the quality of the research. Bringer's PhD was located within a grounded theory framework and relied on NVivo from day one of the research. Notes from the literature were stored in the software as well as the data. The researcher highlighted in the thesis the links between the literature and the data (extremely important in a grounded theory project) and provided, throughout the thesis, screen prints from NVivo to illustrate the decision-making involved in analysing and collecting the data (the technical details on creating screen prints are extremely helpful). The strength in NVivo lies in its ability to offer an array of tools for carefully documenting the research process and the analytical links; whether the tools are adequately used, Bringer *et al.* (p. 250) underline, is down to the "methodological conscientiousness of the researcher."

In the present research, I imported the data documents into NVivo once data collection had been completed and I separated the description of sessions (saved in *Sources > Documents*) from the memos and diary (saved as *Sources > Memos*). During data collection and preliminary analysis, working with printouts of Microsoft Word documents and annotating these in handwriting enabled me to stay close to the data and their context and to "make [the project mine] – not in a sense of ownership but in a sense of familiarity and belonging" (Bazeley and Richards, 2000, p. 87). Once the data had been collected, however, I imported them into NVivo because the software allows researchers to perform complex searches (which would be extremely time-consuming if not impossible when using manual methods) and comparisons, establish relationships among categories, "think 'down' from the categories to all the material about them" (Bazeley and Richards, 2000, p. 53), and create dynamic visual models of both analytical categories and of stages in the research process.

### **5.10 Validity, reliability, generalisability**

Eisenhardt (2002) argues that the strength of building theory from case studies lies in that the theory is novel, testable and empirically valid. With regard to weak points, Eisenhardt mentions overcomplexity (the theory may be "very rich in detail, but lacks the simplicity of overall perspective", p. 30) and limited remit (the theory may be "narrow and



idiosyncratic”, p. 30). Good theory, she points out, following Pfeffer (1982), is “parsimonious, testable, and logically coherent” (p. 37).

Eisenhardt (2002) is a comprehensive account of building theory from case study research. She takes an avowedly positivist position and refers to Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) text on grounded theorising. Her contribution to Miles and Huberman’s (2002) collection is a reprint of an earlier piece which appeared before Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) departure from the then (positivist) orthodoxy in grounded theorising. The inclusion of her work in Miles and Huberman’s collection is justifiable on the basis of the rigorous treatment Eisenhardt offers of the research design, rationale and stages of theory-building from case study; this makes it an excellent point of reference for the present study. The prompt to Eisenhardt’s discussion of theory-building case study research is the critique, levelled at previous theory-building research, that “the tie to actual data has often been tenuous” (2002, p. 5). Combining data collection methods, sites and levels of analysis are important features of case study design, which work towards ensuring the strength of the data-theory relationship. Case studies aimed at building theory should, Eisenhardt argues, contain the following elements:

- an initial definition of the research question
- a priori specification of constructs, without rigidly delimiting relationships among them
- readiness to reformulate the research question on the basis of evidence from the field. (Eisenhardt, 2002, pp. 9-12)

The initial definition of the research question focuses the data collection process thus ensuring that relevant data are acquired. The specification of constructs at the beginning of the research allows the researcher to establish a stronger relationship between the data and those constructs which will be included in the final theory. Having a flexible attitude towards the initial research question and the constructs gives the researcher the opportunity to change direction if necessary and/or to discard irrelevant aspects which would undermine the validity of the final theory.

The selection of cases to be studied, Eisenhardt (2002) points out, “helps to define the limits for generalising the findings” (p. 12). The reasons for selection that Eisenhardt gives are: replication of previous cases; extension of emergent theory; filling in theoretical categories; or providing examples of polar types (p. 12). The focus in selection is on

ensuring the internal consistency of the theory rather than on “obtain[ing] accurate statistical evidence on the distribution of variables within the population” (p. 13). Within the cases, the internal consistency of the theory is ensured through combining data collection methods. The flexibility that Eisenhardt mentions with reference to the initial question and the a priori constructs is extended to data collection: the researcher is encouraged to modify the selection of cases, the choice of data collection instruments or the format of particular instruments (e.g., changing the questions in a interview protocol). Data collection constantly overlaps with data analysis. Eisenhardt advises the researcher to “write down [in the fieldnotes] whatever impressions occur, that is, to react rather than to sift out what may seem important, because it is often difficult to know what will and will not be useful in the future” (p. 15), and to interrogate the notes to formulate questions for subsequent data collection.

### **5.11 A note on ethical considerations in this research**

The discussion of ethics in this section focuses on four related aspects: obtaining informed consent from participants throughout fieldwork; ensuring the anonymity of participants; the use of email for data collection; and issues arising from negotiating researcher and research student roles.

#### **5.11.1 Informed consent**

Prior to my observing the training programme which formed part of the main case study (**Chapter 6**), the programme convenors of each of the two levels asked students whether my presence at the course would in any way inconvenience them. I then had the opportunity to reiterate the access request in person in the first session I observed at each of the two levels. This was repeated when new students joined the programme. Within the main case, I contacted individual session convenors personally by email, using my Open University email address. The initial request for access addressed to the students (together with my email) was posted by the convenors on the virtual learning space dedicated for the training programme. In the process of obtaining informed consent, email contact with participants was in addition to face-to-face communication, and I had the opportunity to meet participants, clarify issues and answer questions about the project as they arose. Information about the project was posted on the virtual learning space and it remained accessible there after consent was obtained, in order to give participants the opportunity to

review it and ask further questions if necessary. The students who agreed to provide information via email in addition to being observed chose to do so using their official university email addresses.

As regards the snapshots (discussed in **Chapter 7**), consent to observe the sessions was obtained from the students in the “Student initiative” session observed, given that the session entailed discussing their work-in-progress. In all the other sessions, I obtained permission to attend and observe from the session convenors.

### 5.11.2 Ensuring anonymity

Given that the research focused on doctoral students who would most likely not have submitted their thesis before this research was written up, I carefully removed and reworded references to substantive aspects of their work. I reassured the participants, both at the beginning and during the fieldwork, that the data they provide would be anonymised:

The data I am hoping to collect involves a mix of observation notes of research training sessions and interviews/focus groups with postgraduate students (for the latter I would request permission from each participant in turn). It goes without saying that I will take the necessary measures to ensure confidentiality and to prevent the source of data from being identified. I would also like to emphasize that my research is directed towards getting insights into cross-disciplinarity and postgraduate training and is in no way concerned with making value judgements on institutional or individual practice.

**Excerpt from email (initial request for access)**

Provided this is alright with you, I would like to use some of the notes I take in your session for my research. In line with ethical guidelines for educational research, the site of the research will be anonymised in my thesis and the authors of comments will not be directly identifiable.

**Excerpt from email (request to observe session 1-D)**

### 5.11.3 Ethical issues in using email to collect data

Email, which complemented face-to-face communication in this research, is a methodologically advantageous means of data collection because it allows participants to respond in their own time, to reflect and construct a full answer to the questions asked, without the pressure of the researcher’s presence. At the same time, however, it poses problems from the point of view of data security. The research relied on various safeguards



to ensure the protection and rights of the participants: not leaving the computer screen unattended when signed on, avoiding casual sight of the screen, regularly changing passwords, making back-up copies of data on a password-protected USB memory stick. The participants sent emails personally to the researcher using the researcher's academic email address to verify identity. While presenting work-in-progress, I did not share data that had not been adequately processed to remove the possibility of participants being identified. Kralik *et al.* (2005) argue that while threats to the confidentiality of email content from IT staff or hackers do exist, these should be put into perspective and that more traditional forms of data collection and storage are not necessarily more secure.

#### 5.11.4 Ethics and researcher roles

Being a research student and at the same time a researcher interested in the doctoral experience was both a factor which facilitated access and a source of discomfort. The participants in the field were welcoming. They were familiar with research conventions and aware that I would eventually attempt to publish parts of the research. I was asked by some of the participants on several occasions whether the information they were providing was useful and whether I was learning something new about research training. As the data collection was in progress, however, I was unable to share conclusive insights with the participants or indeed offer emotional or academic support in moments in which it was apparent that this would have been welcomed. One participant noted that contributing to my research gave them the opportunity to reflect on their own learning and to see their experience through a fresh pair of eyes. However, had I had the opportunity to repeat the research, I would have wanted to be able to offer participants a greater degree of emotional support, as well as practical know-how about managing the doctoral experience, as opposed to more theoretical insights from the research literature.

#### **5.12 Endpiece**

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological choices made in this research project. It has discussed case study methodology, which helped give shape to the nucleus of the present research, i.e., the case study of a year-long research training programme. It has also considered the principles of grounded theorising, which helped coherently to articulate the relationship between the pre-fieldwork stage of the research (document analysis), the case study, and the writing support sessions.

The following chapter focuses on the data pertaining to the “postgraduate research pedagogy” strand of this research (the main fieldwork component), whereas **Chapter 7** opens with the presentation and preliminary analysis of the two writing support sessions observed within the main fieldwork component (the year-long research training course) and then offers an in-depth discussion of the “doctoral writing pedagogy” data strand (*Research components 2 and 4*).

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **EXPLORATION OF A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH TRAINING CULTURE**

#### **6.1 Introductory note**

The opening section in **Chapter 3** offered the example of Becky, a humanities doctoral student who nearly failed to complete her PhD due to lack of access to a “congenial research culture” (Simons, 2005). The “congenial research culture” Simons describes in her study is one in which participants share a common interest in a substantive topic and it (only) partly overlaps with the cross-disciplinary research training culture explored in this chapter. The students attending the research training course documented and analysed in this chapter had access both to debates on substantive topics (albeit in a formal context) and to support of a more practical kind. As the course aims listed in the module handbook indicated, peer learning was an in-built feature of the course design. Training was delivered in a humanities-wide cross-disciplinary context and the course description contained all the ingredients of successful research training put forward by the studies reviewed in **Chapters 2 and 3**: support at the level of process, opportunities for intellectual debate, opportunities for overt reflection on learning, enhanced staff-student interaction, discussion of students’ own work, and opportunities to learn from more advanced peers.

Deem and Brehony’s (2000) definition of research training cultures, on which the present research draws extensively, encompasses the material practices that create and maintain these cultures and the ideation that enables their existence. In **Chapter 2** (see section 2.5.1), three types of research training culture were identified, on the basis of the degree of interaction among participants and of the focus of that interaction. The present chapter takes the third type of research training culture, which places knowledge-making centre-stage and relies on peer learning as an organising principle, and gives it empirical weight by examining its enactment in one university setting for the duration of an academic year. Data collected from a year-long research training programme (main case, see Table 2 in **Chapter 5**) are discussed in this chapter.

Sections 6.2 to 6.7 in this chapter focus on the research training programme overall. The research training programme at the case university consisted of two



strands: one for students in their first year of (full-time) doctoral research (this is referred to as Level 1), the other for students in year 2 and above (Level 2+). Section 6.2 in this chapter offers a brief introduction to the two strands of the case; section 6.3 summarises what the students highlighted as the key issues in the end-of-course evaluation sessions, at both levels. In the ensuing three sections, fieldnotes from the sessions at both levels are synthesized under three main headings, chosen on the basis of session content and focus (these labels are discussed in **Chapter 2**):

- *doctoral content* sessions (section 6.4; subsection 6.4.3 also includes reference to a research methods masterclass observed outside the case for comparison purposes)
- *student presentations* (section 6.5)
- *doctoral context* sessions (section 6.6).

In section 6.7 I summarise insights offered by an experienced academic into the workings of research training for humanities doctoral students and discuss these in the light of the data collected. Discussion in sections 6.2 to 6.7 is based predominantly on document-related and observation data. On the one hand, it aims to offer the reader an overview of the structure and content of the training programme. On the other, it offers a preview of the main insights derived from observation into relevant aspects of teaching and learning in a cross-disciplinary research training programme for humanities doctoral students.

Whereas the angle taken in sections 6.2 to 6.7 is that of individual or groups of sessions, in section 6.8 I explore the research training experience from the viewpoint of individual participants. Section 6.8 looks at students' emailed replies to questions about their conceptualization of doctoral research and of research training, the role of the supervisor in research training, and the social nature of knowledge production throughout the process of research.

In section 6.9, I list and describe the sensitizing themes I derived from the document analysis on which I report in **Chapter 2** and the preliminary reading of the literature discussed in **Chapters 3** and **4** in this thesis. These are then revisited in the light of the data collected. Finally, in section 6.10, I synthesize the dimensions of cross-disciplinary research training and, on the basis of these, make recommendations for the pedagogic framing of research training.

In this chapter, I give empirical weight to the concept of research training culture. I explore the tensions that arise when students bring to the course a conceptualization of

research as discipline-specific apprenticeship, which does not overlap with the kind of learning afforded by formal research training programmes. I argue that, while Type 3 research training cultures are closest to a discipline-specific environment, the input that the students are being offered and the teaching and learning roles students and lecturers adopt when negotiating meaning are likely to be different from those available, in discipline-specific contexts, to the students at the undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels.

## **6.2 Research training course overview**

When I approached the course convenors to obtain permission to carry out research into the course they were organizing, they underlined the fact that the course was very much work-in-progress: it was being reorganized in response to QAA requirements. This was highlighted in the module handbooks as well. The course took place for the duration of an academic year, between October and July; the students who attended the course and completed the assessment were given a certificate. In what follows, I offer an overview of each of the two strands of the course (referred to as Level 1 and Level 2+), based on the information available in the module handbooks. I also comment briefly on the disciplinary affiliation of participants, on the basis of observation notes from each session attended.

### 6.2.1 Level 1

The Level 1 strand was designed to support students in their first year of doctoral research up to the point of formal registration for the degree. It consisted of four blocks:

1. familiarising students with the research culture at that institution, in terms of access both to material resources (the library, funding for conferences and events, IT sessions available) and to seminars and academic support networks
2. choosing and developing a topic; performing a literature search; selecting appropriate methodologies and methods; the politics and ethics of research
3. specific methodologies
4. (a) individual student meetings with course convenors to discuss research proposals and (b) student presentations.

The sessions from Block 1 will be discussed further below in the “doctoral context” category. Blocks 2 and 3 fall into the “doctoral content” category, whereas Block 4

sessions will be analysed in the section on “student presentations”. Different speakers were invited for each of the sessions in the “specific methodologies” block; input from the library and IT support staff was also incorporated into the course. The module handbook the students received contained an extensive reading list about doing a doctorate in general and specific methodologies in particular.

Feedback on course design was highlighted in the module handbook, as follows.

We see student feedback as an on-going process during the course of the whole year because the module is taught in a dialogic way. We also expect to adjust the module’s content to the particular topics pursued by student members each year. In addition to this normal dialogue there will be a module review in the last session when you will be invited to comment on the module’s strengths and weaknesses.

In addition, you will be asked to present your views to elected course representatives who will attend the [course committee meetings].

Besides this you can also raise any problems you may have regarding the course, with the course team, either directly after the session or by arranging an appointment through the usual routes (directly after sessions, phone, e-mail).

**[Module Handbook, Level 1]**

The module handbook was available in print and online; updates on the sessions were posted regularly on a web-based discussion board. Online interaction, however, throughout the course, was mostly uni-directional – the convenors posted information which was accessed by a number of participants, but which did not serve as a springboard for discussion. Thus, the research training culture materialised in an almost exclusively face-to-face mode.

Assessment at Level 1 consisted of the research proposal which the students submitted as part of the registration process and a presentation on the last day of the course. For the sessions on specific methodologies, the students were asked to write two short book reviews and a brief encyclopaedia entry on a theoretical development of their choice.

### 6.2.2 Level 2+

The Level 2+ strand was more or less equally divided into (a) input sessions and (b) student presentations of work-in-progress. The input sessions covered substantive theories and methodologies (“doctoral content”) as well as the institutional framing of doctorates (“doctoral context”). The student presentations at Level 2+ were given by



students from the following disciplines/fields: creative writing, cultural studies, education and international relations. While attendance patterns at the presentations varied, my observation notes show that at least two different disciplines were represented in the group of participants in any one session. A different student was asked by the tutor to take notes from each session and to post them on the online workspace for the benefit of the students who had not been able to attend.

The students were positioned, in the course description available in the module handbook, as partners with equal rights in the process of course design, as indicated in the text emphasized below.

The whole module is in draft at the beginning of the academic year [...] At the same time the University research regulations have been reviewed and redrafted. Constraints are imposed by the QAA on the possible content of the modules. *However, we are keen that the views and wishes of the students are taken fully into account in designing the course and determining the content.*

The overall shape of the research methods programme as a whole, and of this module in particular, is clear. However *details of the content will change in response to student feedback.* A draft programme is set out below. *We will be asking your views during the course of the modules, and, as usual, at the end of each block. In addition, you will be asked to present your views to elected course representatives who will attend the [course committee meetings].*

**[Module Handbook, Level 2+] (my emphasis)**

Assessment at Level 2+ consisted of student presentations.

### 6.2.3 The students

Between them, the two strands targeted an audience of students from several disciplines from the library- or archive-based Humanities as well as from creative disciplines. A number of social sciences students using qualitative research methodology also attended the course. Within each strand, there was sufficient disciplinary variation to allow the formulation of claims, in this research, about learning in cross-disciplinary environments. As some commonalities were evident across the two levels, coding and categorisation cut across the data; where necessary, however, differences in the data and implications across the levels are explored throughout this chapter.

Having provided an overview of the research training course observed as part of the main case, I look in more detail, in the following five sections, at the various

components of the course. Discussion of the three categories of sessions identified is prefaced by a summary of the students' evaluation of the course once coursework had been completed and ends with insights into the workings of research training programmes, provided by what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) refer to as an "expert informant". Book-ending the presentation and discussion of observation data from the sessions with evaluative comments made by students (section 6.3) and by an experienced convenor (section 6.7) serves the purpose of enhancing the reliability of and adding depth to the analysis (for a discussion of validity and reliability, see also Chapter 5).

### **6.3 End-of-course evaluation sessions**

In the last two-hour session at Level 1,<sup>23</sup> the students were invited to fill in an evaluation form and to raise additional relevant issues in a group discussion. The evaluation form addressed the following:

- to what extent the aims of the course had been met
- teaching strategies
- module assessment
- overall module organization.

In the follow-up discussion, the students made several points, to which the convenors had the opportunity to respond there and then. Thus, it can be argued that the convenors gave students the opportunity to make sense of the justification underlying certain instructional choices and that this most likely meant that both categories of participant benefited from the feedback session.

The edited observation notes below from the feedback session at Level 1 indicate that the key issues raised were as follows.

#### *Relevance of session content*

As would be expected, it was noted by the students that "some sessions were more useful than other sessions". It is impossible to please everybody, the students agreed. They noted that the sessions served to broaden horizons, to help place oneself within the research community. The students said they understood that there had to be some acceptance on both sides that "it can't all be relevant" (one

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<sup>23</sup> This session was followed by the student presentations day.



lecture in particular was highlighted by all the students as not having been at all fine-tuned to their specialisms).

*“Practical” sessions*

IT skills and library sessions were unanimously praised by the students: “those have a universal appeal”. However, the session on Research & Enterprise did not meet with approval: “not the best for us”, “not useful for humanities students”, “I’m not doing this to make money”.

*Guest speakers*

Professors are invited as guest speakers, the convenor noted, because it is assumed that they have the highest degree of expertise (this is why they are being targeted). Furthermore, it is hoped that once research training becomes “part of the job” (line managers’ help needs to be secured), convenors will have more power to negotiate how much preparation the speakers should do. The convenors pointed out that “There aren’t obvious things in this job”, but “guest speakers have to prepare well” to make sure that their contribution is relevant for the students.

*Students presenting*

More student presentations were requested by the students – in particular, presentations by students who were more advanced in their research and who could share the ups and downs of their experience.

*Supervisors and the research training course*

The question of assistance from supervisors was raised by the students. The convenors pointed out that “They [supervisors] now understand the value of this course.” Supervisor engagement with the course varied greatly, both the students and the convenors agreed.

*Negotiating power*

The students were encouraged to adopt the view that “we are the customers”; however, the convenors admitted that it was not always easy to put that across to those in charge of finances. It was noted by the convenors and the students that support at faculty level was available (and highly appreciated).

*Link with other universities*

The students pointed out that they had looked to see what other universities in the area offered as research training; they suggested cooperation across geographically close universities where possible.

**[Edited fieldnotes, Feedback session, Level 1]**

My observation notes from the feedback sessions at both levels show that the social dimension of the training programme was highlighted both by Level 1 and by Level 2+ students. Level 1 course participants, who were all enrolled full-time and working towards degree registration stage, appreciated being part of a group whose members had, in the words of one student, “the same anxieties and problems” about

research. Level 2+ course participants were predominantly part-time students, for whom the course provided “the necessary discipline” to remain focused on the research, as well as a real audience and a “safe place” (outside disciplinary cultures) to talk about research and to “articulate confusion” (“articulate” both in the sense of voicing and in the sense of finding – at least temporary – structure and coherence).

In the end-of-course feedback sessions, as evidenced in my notes, the students evaluated the learning opportunities available to them, made suggestions about elements that could be incorporated into future courses, suggested cooperation across institutions, received immediate responses to some of the issues raised and were encouraged by the convenors to take control over their own learning by playing an active part in determining what is included in the research training programme. Feedback, thus, was not uni-directional: the convenors learnt ways in which the course could be improved and the students were offered the opportunity to gain increased awareness of ways in which they can make the most of the resources available to them. The opportunity to reflect on learning and on the parameters of the learning situation which this bidirectionality presupposes is what I would like to put forward as a defining feature of a Type 3 research training culture.

Another essential feature of Type 3 research training cultures, which differentiate these from the other two types identified in **Chapter 2**, is offering a balanced mixture of content, context, and student presentation sessions. In what follows, discussion is organised on the basis of each of these categories. Each category is detailed in a separate section with the help of data from the research training course explored in the fieldwork component of the present research.

#### **6.4 The doctoral content sessions**

The issues listed above offer a summary of the students’ evaluation of their learning experience, accompanied by the convenors’ responses to some of the points raised. In what follows, I am discussing the content of the training course. The discussion is divided into three sections: doctoral content sessions (6.4), student presentations sessions (6.5) and doctoral context sessions (6.6) (see **Chapter 2** for an explanation of these labels).

The doctoral content sessions fell into two main categories: substantive sessions focusing on specific cultural issues or research approaches (e.g., modernism, postmodernity, grounded theory) and sessions unpacking key aspects of academic research (e.g., formulating a research question, choosing an appropriate methodology,



examining/explaining the epistemological underpinning of a research project). In what follows, they are referred to as the “substantive” sessions and the “research metalanguage” sessions. At Level 1, the substantive sessions ran in parallel to the sessions focusing on research metalanguage, the doctoral context or student presentations. By contrast, at Level 2+, the sessions were interspersed and the students had a greater degree of control over the choice of topics.

#### 6.4.1 “Substantive” doctoral content sessions

As the Level 1 module handbook states, the substantive sessions at Level 1 were held together by a concern with the role which theoretical and philosophical reflection played in the process of knowledge-making in academia. Examples of session titles for Level 1 are “Structure and Agency”, “Psychoanalysis as Cultural Theory”, “Globalisation”. My observation notes indicate that the general template for the sessions was exposition followed by discussion based on a reading circulated in advance. The academics delivering the sessions had control over the way in which each session was organised and the template was not followed to the letter in all cases.

As indicated in the module handbook (and evidenced in the observation notes I took), the aims underpinning the inclusion of substantive sessions in the programme at Level 1 were both formative and informative, and acknowledged the social aspect of research.

- To introduce some common terms of conceptual reference across a variety disciplinary areas in both the Arts and the Humanities. [informative aim]
  - To encourage free and open discussion and participation in the ongoing debates about the uses – and abuses – of Theory. [formative aim]
  - To improve access to staff members as resources for research students. [social aspect aim]
- [Research training handbook, Level 1, Module B]** (The labels in square brackets are my own.)

Assessment consisted of two short book reviews and an encyclopaedia entry. The students were encouraged to choose texts and topics for the assessment.

At Level 2+ the choice of substantive sessions depended to a large extent on the disciplinary make-up of the student audience. As emphasized in subsection 6.2.2 in this chapter, the students were invited to put forward suggestions for this aspect of the course.

The observation notes I took from the substantive sessions at both levels show that the angle taken on the topics was just as important as topic choice. Emphasis appeared to be put on drawing out the implications of the session's theme for academic research, rather than on a neutral presentation of periodisation and key concerns. For example, the session on postmodernity drew on Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, as indicated below.

The presentation appeared to be underpinned by an irreverent approach to research, an urging to take apart what has been said before, to actively engage with it rather than be intimidated by its weight and to reconstruct it to ask personally relevant questions that fit into what Lyotard labels the closed truth – technology – money system.

**[Memo Session I(1), Level 2+]**

In the session on grounded theory, the lecturer similarly emphasized the malleability of theory and its place in the research process:

Doing theory, the audience was told, is “first and foremost a process of re-writing”, one for which the past, the observed, acts as a prompt. Abstracting is necessary in the act of moving from what is observed to the theory. Theory is “nothing but drawing upon concepts to construct a provisional answer to the central, leading question”.

**[Edited fieldnotes, Session II, Level 2+]**

The two examples included above demonstrate that the substantive input that the students are being given in this instance of a Type 3 research training culture is offered not in order to be absorbed and accumulated (in other words, it is not part of a process of knowledge-transmission) but in order to prompt reflection on and the taking apart of existing knowledge-making conventions in the disciplines. The formative aim of the training appeared to take precedence over the informative aim.

#### 6.4.2 “Research metalanguage” doctoral content sessions

Cross-disciplinary training environments, as was apparent from the analysis of research training handbooks discussed in Chapter 2, rely on a transdisciplinary set of concepts related to academic research (e.g., ontology, epistemology, methodology, method) that may acquire different meanings according to the disciplinary context to which it is applied, but that can ultimately be interpreted across the disciplines.



Research metalanguage content sessions, focusing on a transdisciplinary set of concepts, were present also in the research training course observed as part of this research. An important thing to note with reference to research metalanguage sessions is that, as my observation notes indicate, making sense of the key concepts was a collaborative activity.

The group defined the two keywords of the session – epistemology and methodology – and unpacked the relationships between them. Each student then explained to the group the epistemological and methodological assumptions behind their research. In the cases in which research approaches and perspectives could not straightforwardly be labelled, the group debated together the kind of knowledge the individual researcher was attempting to produce and the conventions that dictated what could and what could not be said about a particular topic.

**[Edited fieldnotes, Session D, Level 2+]**

A similar format was adopted in three of the research metalanguage sessions observed at Level 1, where the session convenors invited the students to describe their research projects with reference to the transdisciplinary issues that formed the focus of each section (e.g., theory, the thesis as a contribution to knowledge, and the research proposal, respectively). Peer learning, a fundamental dimension of a Type 3 research training culture, came through in the data discussed in this section; the edited fieldnotes above support the qualification of the training programme discussed in this chapter as a close representation of a Type 3 research training culture.

#### 6.4.3 Convenor roles

My observation notes from the content sessions indicate that the academics involved in research training were allocated two roles in the process of teaching and learning about doctoral research:

- (a) to explain, for the student audience, sets of knowledge-making conventions in the academics' home disciplines (*the discipline expert*)
- (b) to anticipate ways in which the particular theoretical or methodological approach the academics present may prove problematic to understand given the disciplinary backgrounds of the students (*the research trainer*).

In what follows, I will illustrate the deployment of both roles with the help of fieldnotes from a four-hour research methods masterclass on feminism, observed outside the case, at a different university.

The lecture on feminism began with a general introduction to the movement, covering periodization, key names, and research agendas, and it was delivered by a lecturer from a Media and Cultural Studies department. The lecturer carefully foregrounded the way in which research questions are set up within her area of study – which, she noted, she would not have done with her undergraduate/MA students, who, to a certain extent, take this for granted, by virtue of being positioned within the field. Emphasis was also placed in the lecture on the multiplicity of perspectives brought under the labels “feminism”, “women’s studies” or “gender studies” and the underlying epistemological commitments of some of these perspectives.

In the second part of the session, the lecturer briefly introduced five research projects informed by a feminist agenda but housed in different departments and she invited students to explore the implications and limitations of each approach. The discussion also touched on different ways in which disciplines choose to foreground certain aspects of knowledge-making in the process of textualisation.

**[Edited fieldnotes, Research Methods masterclass]**

Arguably, the second role (research trainer) is more problematic to take up, given that it involves stepping outside one’s disciplinary comfort zone and meeting the students halfway, but is vital in ensuring a high degree of coherence to the research training programme. The research methods masterclass was recommended to me as an example of best practice by an academic with over ten years’ experience of training humanities doctoral students. The rationale behind collecting data from the masterclass was to confirm and further flesh out the two convenor roles identified on the basis of case data.

From the observation of doctoral content sessions across the two levels, I derived three important insights into cross-disciplinary research training cultures. One, that the formative aim of input sessions appeared to take precedence over the informative aim. Second, that the formative learning situations observed entailed a careful negotiation, by the session convenors, of two complementary roles: that of discipline expert and that of research trainer. The latter resonates with discussions, in the literature on interdisciplinary teaching and learning (see **Chapter 3** in this thesis), on “bridging and hugging” (Perkins and Salomon, 1988) and on offering opportunities for integrating knowledge from various non-cognate domains. Third, and equally importantly, that knowledge-making in this cross-disciplinary training course was framed as a collaborative activity.



## **6.5 The student presentations**

### **6.5.1 The student presentation sessions: An overview**

As discussed in the previous section, the content sessions provided input on specific theories and methodologies and on key concepts in doctoral research (ontology, epistemology, methodology, method). Overall, the emphasis was on the process of knowledge production rather than on transmitting knowledge. As well as input sessions, the course included sessions in which students took up the role of knowledge producers and presented work-in-progress.

At Level 1, the student presentations were scheduled on the last day of the course and focused on the first-year registration document (rather than being allocated slots throughout the year, as at Level 2+). A little under half of the students presenting had already had the opportunity to discuss their work in a first-year registration meeting with the appointed panel. Below, I include an excerpt from a memo on the student presentations session at Level 1. The aim of this is twofold. First, to summarise the beginning of the presentations day. Second, to illustrate the interaction taking place among participants, and thus to offer a basis for constructing an argument, in the second half of this chapter, about knowledge-making being framed as a collaborative activity in a cross-disciplinary research training culture.

The day starts with a presentation on post-war urban redevelopment. The focus is on a city in the UK and the audience (made up of the regular course attenders, all presenters, two supervisors, two convenors and one observer) pay careful attention to a Powerpoint presentation (video clips and images included) which speaks to everybody. One doesn't have to be a historian to understand what the presenter is talking about. No complicated jargon there. Questions come in – about choice of topic and the political context – easily answered by the student and the supervisor (the small number of supervisors present do intervene, not in a defensive way, not in a patronising “I know better” way, not trying to “rescue” the student). The presentation ends – a sigh of relief, a joke about the delivery. They like each other in this group, their nine-month (Oct-June) journey towards registration for the PhD and research training certification has given them (at least a temporary) sense of belonging to a group (the research training culture defined by Deem and Brehony, 2000).

The second presentation – a confident voice – a researcher very much in control of the topic, and very audience-aware. Again, the topic – the role of literature in the creation of a collective memory of an event – seems to strike a chord with everybody. Or at least so the questions imply. The research is a part of a larger project, but, the

student says, “I’ve been given a lot of freedom to make it more my own”.  
[Memo, Student presentations, Level 1]

At Level 2+, the student presentations took up approximately one third of the course. The students, who were at various stages in their research, gave presentations at a number of points throughout the year; their brief was to draw on an extensive discussion of methodology in their projects. The course convenors were not in the audience at all the presentations; attendance on the students’ part also varied for these sessions.

#### 6.5.2 The student presentations: Learning value and learning agendas

At both levels, it can be argued that student presentations within formal training were aligned with the development of individual research projects. Among the Level 2+ students who provided reflective notes on the presentations for my research, there was agreement that preparing for presentations prompted them to bring together and articulate the connections among various strands of their project in a supportive environment, which recognised the work-in-progress nature of the work.

The student presenters noted that substantive feedback on their presentations was far from substantial. Not being able to derive substantive feedback from the session was flagged up by the students as potentially one of the reasons underlying non-attendance on the part of their colleagues. One of the students remarked that:

I don’t really see the point of these presentations ... I mean, you have to do them to get the certificate, but the lecturers who are there won’t be able to contribute any useful ideas because they are from other departments ... I’m the only [discipline] student in the group and I don’t think the other students are very interested in my work or know enough to take part in a discussion.  
[Re: Session A, Level 2+]

A small number of students categorized the presentations as “informative” (“new things are learnt”), provided there was enough similarity in research design or disciplinary area between the presenter’s project and their own. The benefits the students did derive from the presentations appeared to be greater when the students’ learning agendas were not set to disciplinary content. One student admitted that:



I didn't get much from that presentation, to be honest. It was not my field and I couldn't really follow what [the presenter] was saying. Having said that, it was not a waste of time, because [the presenter] was really good at using PowerPoint, so I did learn something useful. Maybe a couple of slides had too much information on them, but I like the way in which [the presenter] used the audio clips and didn't overdo the animation bit. With other people, the background is all over the place and they don't think of slides as a way to help you [the audience] follow the structure of the presentation. You end up not knowing what to look at first and where you are in the talk...

**[Re: Session A, Level 2+]**

Individual learning agendas appeared to be important in determining the learning value of sessions.

Apart from learning technical skills from the presentations attended, the following benefits were indicated by the students.

- (a) Presentations offer a term of comparison for the audience, not only as regards research progress ("it helps to see what stage the other students are at in their research") but also in terms of presentation structure and elements:

A member of the audience who was knowledgeable about the historical context of the student's research bridged the gap between the student's presentation and the audience's understanding of the topic. It was interesting to see how the same terminology acquired different meanings across disciplines. "Critical discourse analysis" and "case study" were two such examples. Critical discourse analysis was here used in the version closest to the social sciences end of research (rather than in the version based on close linguistic analysis) and case study did not carry the full methodological implications it would have in educational research. Additionally, the student presenter remarked that he had removed one word from the presentation (a reference to one particular ideology) because he thought his audience would not be familiar with it.

**[Edited fieldnotes, Session J]**

- (b) Presentations are an opportunity for "moral support" and for contributing to community-building (social function).
- (c) Presentations offer an opportunity for safe rehearsal of being in the audience at a conference presentation.
- (d) Presentations have transformative potential – they make presenters think about the structure and content of their research:

You hear yourself explaining things to somebody else and you think, wait a minute, I should have put that differently, and does it make sense to them, and this forces you to rethink the connections and the order in which you put your ideas across ... and then, even if you can't answer questions on the spot, you make a mental note ... and re-jig things when you get home ... I would say it's useful to air your ideas, even if your audience doesn't give you any immediately useful feedback.

**[Re: Session A, Level 2+]**

You make connections that you may not have made just by sitting at your desk. Simply by cutting and rearranging material to fit into a twenty-minute slot, you end up looking at your work with a fresh pair of eyes.

**[Re: Session A, Level 2+]**

From the point of view of the students in the audience, sessions were described as successful when participants could find something that “kept them anchored” (in the words of one student), that enabled them to learn something useful or actively to take part in the discussion. Common ground could be found in several areas: the methodology (e.g., visual ethnography in Cultural Studies or Education projects), in the object of study (e.g., poetry), in the theoretical stance (e.g., feminism), or in the delivery.

### 6.5.3 Learner roles in the cross-disciplinary training programme

Staying anchored in the presentation, however, did not necessarily mean asking questions. The small number of international students on the course noted that they refrained from asking questions because they perceived these as a negative response to the content of the presentation; in the words of one student, “if I ask a question it means that the presenter forgot something or did something wrong or was not clear enough”.<sup>24</sup> Questions for clarification were also felt to reflect badly on the person posing them; one of the reasons why students refrained from asking such questions was because they were concerned they would appear “like an undergraduate”. The other main reason was that students felt their role was to be “one step ahead” and offer “useful feedback”, and they did not perceive the contribution they might have made to the discussion as being of use to the presenter.

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<sup>24</sup> Their reluctance to ask questions can arguably be linked to the tradition of the specific (national) academic culture in which the students completed undergraduate or taught postgraduate degrees. However, this argument is based on the assumption that national academic cultures are homogeneous entities, an assumption which is increasingly being questioned by research focusing on international students.

Apart from the speaker in session J (see data box in the previous subsection, [Edited fieldnotes, Session J]), no presenter made an overt effort to accommodate a multi-disciplinary audience in their presentation by giving detailed explanation of key terms and overtly acknowledging the possibility of misinterpretation across the disciplines. In retrospect, some of the students noted that they would not have been able to identify potentially problematic areas in their presentation because the differences in knowledge-making across disciplines were too great. Student presentations were again framed in terms of disciplinary expertise, whereas, as one of the convenors noted, the emphasis should more readily have been placed on defining the key terms and components and on communicating the material in a way that would help presenters themselves identify possible ways of rearranging the material. There is a noticeable tension in the data between viewing knowledge-making as accumulating and refining disciplinary content (disciplinary expertise) on the one hand, and as discursive expertise (articulating knowledge and insights) on the other.

The level of informality in presentations varied. Some students positioned themselves as contributors to the scholarly debate in their discipline and organised their presentation as they would have for an academic conference; others were more comfortable in the PhD student role, using more informal language to talk about their projects. The latter did refer to research keywords that had been used in the course (e.g., “method”, “abstracts and universals”, “ontological level”) but foregrounded them as formal labels rather than incorporating them seamlessly into the presentation.<sup>25</sup>

Hermerschmidt (2005) writes:

As discussed in section one, ‘a student’s personal identity [...] may be challenged by the form of writing required (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 35) but also, as Harry here demonstrates, by the form of *speaking* required. (Hermerschmidt, 2005, p. 171, the author’s emphasis)

The comment by Harry, a participant in Hermerschmidt’s research to whom she refers, is as follows: “When I’m in a class, [...] and I’m contributing, that isn’t really me, I don’t, I sort of almost feel that I switch into another way of being. (Harry, 2nd interview, p. 11)” (Hermerschmidt, 2005, p. 171). Hermerschmidt’s interpretation of Harry’s comment can be extended to the students’ comments in my research vis-à-vis the questions asked in the research training course and the way in which the students

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<sup>25</sup> These findings call for attention to particularities of disciplinary discourses and to levels of academic language. Whereas students familiarise themselves with the disciplinary terms and concepts at the undergraduate level, the research metalanguage is arguably acquired at postgraduate level and beyond.



positioned themselves in their presentations. It can be argued, thus, that students negotiate at least two complementary roles in the learning situations occurring throughout the research training programme. The first role is conceptualised in terms of subject-matter expertise and its adoption arguably has an impact on the successful negotiation of meaning from doctoral content sessions and from student presentations, as well as on students' performance in these learning situations. The second role, that of a doctoral student at a specific institution, is played out primarily in doctoral context sessions, which are discussed in the following section.

The students' replies to my email about what was being gained from the presentations (see section 6.5.2) and my observation notes on their in-session performance show that the kind of learning being derived from the student presentations had mostly to do with non-content-related aspects, for the audience, and with clearly articulating the various components of their projects, for the presenters ("clarity of expression"). It was also apparent that more was gained when learning agendas were not set to discipline-specific content. Lastly, discursive expertise, i.e., the ability to describe and extract salient points from one's project, varied according to the extent to which the students were able to incorporate the research metalanguage learnt from the course seamlessly into their presentations. The "way of speaking" students adopted positioned them as either members of a discipline who had been able to integrate the research metalanguage into their projects and were proficient users of the discourse in their home disciplines, or as doctoral students who were still trying to negotiate the value of research keywords for their projects and were uncomfortable with the new language they were expected to use.

The doctoral content sessions and the student presentations sessions were closest to the discipline research culture; yet the kind of learning prefigured in these sessions (through lecturer input and session format) and derived from them (as evidenced in the students' presentations and in the replies they provided to my questions) is, I argue, governed by a different set of pedagogic aims, learner agendas, and participant roles.

## **6.6 The doctoral context sessions**

In doctoral context sessions, which the students referred to as "practical" sessions in their end-of-course evaluation comments, were perceived by all as the most immediately useful part of the course (see section 6.3). In what follows, I introduce the QAA's recommendations in this respect; I then refer to the module handbooks and introductory sessions at each of the two levels and I group subsequent context sessions

under five main labels. I summarise the input students were offered in each category of context session. I offer an overview of the facilities available to students at the case institution in order to ascertain the extent of an institutional basis for the creation of a “place” research training culture (see the definition of “place” and “focus” discourse communities in **Chapter 1**). I also analyse the rhetoric of research training aired in context sessions and draw upon students’ reflective comments with reference to the session about supervision in order to illuminate how the supervision relationship was constructed by formal research training and in what way supervision and training may be interrelated.

The “Postgraduate research programmes” section of the QAA (2004) *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* stipulates that:

10. Institutions will provide research students with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment in which they will be working. (p. 12)

This information, the Code specifies, should include, among others things:

- the institution’s registration, enrolment, appeals and complaints procedures, assessment requirements and research degree regulations;
- a summary of the facilities that will be made available to the student, including the learning support infrastructure;
- where appropriate, a brief outline of the proposed research programme(s), together with the normal length of study and the facilities that will be made available to the student; details about opportunities and requirements for skills development. (pp. 12-13)

One of the universities whose research training handbooks were examined in **Chapter 2** prefaced its training programme with a session on the programme’s aims and projected benefits:

Session 1: Why research training?

- Why I need research training
- Why should I take it seriously?
- Where is this taking me?
- How am I going to get there?

[Research training handbook, Uni 5]

The research training course observed as part of the case study relied on a similar introduction. The emphasis in the case introductory sessions at both levels was on stages in the research process and on ways in which the training programme was designed to meet the learning needs of doctoral students at each stage.

As the module handbooks indicate, at Level 1, coursework was directed towards getting started in research and producing a research proposal, whereas at Level 2+ the overarching aim was to bring together a research student network whose members could support each other by sharing their experience of research. The goal of fostering an increased degree of autonomy in the students was evident in the shift in types of coursework activity from Level 1 to Level 2+.

The doctoral context sessions were flagged up by the students in the evaluation sessions at both levels as a vital component of research training. While these sessions arguably did not have a direct impact on the intellectual content of the thesis, they were nevertheless considered, by the students taking part in them, to be playing an important role in supporting knowledge-making. Their role consisted of helping create adequate conditions in which content-related issues could be developed. Across the two levels, the doctoral context sessions covered five main areas:

- a) access to resources (e.g., the library, computing space, other research staff, etc.)
- b) the institutional scaffolding of PhD research (institution-specific processes and procedures, such as registration, research degree regulations, QAA requirements)
- c) the supervisory relationship
- d) preparation for the viva
- e) course evaluation (see section 6.3).

Points a) – d) are discussed below.

#### 6.6.1 Access to resources

My observation notes from doctoral context sessions and from the informal discussions I had with the students show that, as regards resources, workspace provision for doctoral students at the case institution consisted of a room with networked PCs and a “common room”. The students did not have offices and were not part of a campus-based culture. The home students visited the campus to use the library, for supervision sessions or when/if teaching. They were invited to departmental research seminars, but few attended, and only when the seminar had a perceived direct relevance to the



students' own research. Practice varied across departments with regard to the degree of postgraduate student inclusion in departmental activities.

#### 6.6.2 The institutional scaffolding of PhD research

The institutional scaffolding of PhD research was discussed by the head of research in the Faculty of Humanities in a session aimed at explaining the administrative steps taken at that university to support doctoral research. The key points covered in the session were: *mechanisms for funding, quality assurance, registration documents, university regulations, research training certification*. The speaker explained the purposes of the mechanisms in place that control the research process in a way which came across as empowering, as informing the students how they could take control over what is happening in the process of research. The presentation of the "facts" from the research handbook was interspersed with stories about his experience as a PhD student and about the way in which that determined and enabled his entry into academia.

#### 6.6.3 The supervisory relationship

The supervisory relationship was discussed in a doctoral context session (Session C) at Level 2+. Below I include a summary of the fieldnotes I took from the first part of this session.

Session C had two main topics: supervision (Part 1) and critical friends (Part 2). With regard to supervision, the issue of power was flagged up, both in its material and in its symbolic aspects. The tutor noted that she was intending to organise the students in pairs/groups and ask them to fill in a matrix about their experience of being supervised and then share this with the other pairs/groups; however, the small number of students attending made this difficult, so the six participants worked together round a table and identified good and bad moments in the relationship, although nobody gave an example of a total breakdown in communication. The conclusion the students drew was that two supervisors were needed, rather than just one, but that the relationship among the student and the supervisors had to be carefully negotiated. The questions on the handout given to the students projected a view of the supervisory relationship as a process in which change was inevitable but also as one in which students had a "proactive" role, one of managing the relationship rather than being passive recipients.

**[Edited fieldnotes, Session C, Level 2+]**

Some aspects of the supervisory relationship were identified by the participants in the session as common across the disciplines. The following were listed by the academic convening the session and confirmed by the students attending:

- each supervisor has a specific area of expertise and may offer differing amounts of input at various stages in the research project
- supervisors may offer conflicting feedback
- the supervisory relationship rarely remains at the same level throughout the duration of the research project.

Changes in the supervision relationship, the students were told in the session, occur not only because the students' gradual acquisition of subject matter expertise brings with it a modification in the kind of support the student requires from a supervisor, but also because doctoral research entails identity work alongside knowledge acquisition. Being a student, being a novice member of a disciplinary community of practice, and achieving gradual recognition as a full player in a disciplinary field have an impact on the way in which the supervisory relationship is conducted and on the way in which doctoral research progresses.

The students who provided reflective notes on the session noted that the session was useful because of its emphasis on “making the relationship work” rather than seeing it as an area to be policed. Knowing that there are mechanisms in place for dealing with a supervisory relationship is reassuring, yet more beneficial, the students pointed out, was being aware that a supervisory relationship is constructed by its participants rather than “happening by itself” and that it has its highs and lows.

In the second part of the session, critical friends were recommended by the session organizers as a vital resource in doctoral research.

The second part of the session was about critical friends. These could be family members, people met at conferences, other students on the course, people doing PhDs on similar topics. The students were advised to go actively in search of critical friends – people who can ask questions that lead to a deeper understanding of the topic and who “refrain from any anecdotes, adverse criticisms or suggested solutions that might distract or deflect [a person's] reflective thinking” [reference on the handout]. In the ensuing group discussion, the following questions were considered: Who gets chosen as a critical

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|---|
| friend? Where does the “job” of a supervisor end and that of a critical friend begin? How can you find them and cultivate them?<br>[Edited fieldnotes, Session C, Level 2+] |
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#### 6.6.4 Preparation for the viva

Preparation for the viva was discussed in Session J(1) at Level 2+. One important way in which students can get ready for the viva, the session convenor pointed out, is to prepare an answer to the question “if you could tell us briefly what your PhD is about?”. Getting to the viva stage, the convenors emphasized, entails constantly asking oneself “what is the last thesis chapter going to look like?”, and maintaining control over the argument by making sure the premise, the insights from the literature, what the data reveal and the way the conclusions are articulated work as a coherent whole.

In summary, the doctoral context sessions yielded data from which the following features of a research training culture may be abstracted:

- providing relevant information on the institutional environment (practical facilities, registration and viva procedures, resources available, means of accessing training opportunities)
- putting forward a view of training as something to be not passively accepted but actively engaged with
- projecting an image of supervision as a relationship co-constructed by participants
- reiterating a view of research as collaborative sense-making (see also doctoral content and student presentation sessions) by signalling the importance of critical friends
- creating an opportunity for students to reflect on the main relationships in the process of research (supervision and critical friends), on training opportunities available and on practical facilities.

#### **6.7 Convenor insights**

An academic with extensive experience of convening research training programmes at the case institution contributed, in a semi-structured interview, the following insights into the workings of research training for humanities doctoral students:

- “[training] worked best when there wasn’t assessment”



- training should ideally involve “build[ing] supported activity around [the thesis]” (the thesis being the central activity in humanities PhD research)
- the provision of training at the case institution, in its initial stage, was formalised in response to the demand from faculty administration to offer support for registration and transfer
- abstracting the method from the content may be compatible with the social sciences model of research training but is not readily achievable in the Humanities
- good researchers do not automatically make good research trainers.

The points this academic raised provided a useful term of comparison for my analysis of case data, as I indicate below.

In the evaluation sessions organized at the end of the course (see also section 6.3 in this chapter), the students did not express misgivings about assessment. They were overall satisfied with the way in which the assignments for the training course contributed to the progress of their own research projects.

Training across the two levels, as can be noted from the menu of sessions available in the module handbooks, was maintained as a way of supporting registration and transfer. At Level 1, training involved supported activity around the registration document; at Level 2+ the students were expected to present material they were submitting in order to upgrade to doctoral student registration from MPhil student status, or which they expected to include in a theoretical or methodological chapter in the thesis.

Discussion of specific methods and methodologies in the doctoral content sessions across the two levels paid careful attention to the context in which the methods/methodologies were being applied. For example, the students were encouraged by the convenor of one of the substantive sessions to ground theory in the primary texts read or the data collected.

Finally, the students’ comments in the evaluation sessions and the session interaction which I documented by means of observation notes revealed the imperfect overlap between the research trainer role and discipline expert role.

### **6.8 Student views on research training**

In this chapter, discussion so far has been guided by sessions as a unit of analysis, and the students’ replies to the emailed questions which I included in this chapter up to this point have addressed specific issues arising from individual sessions. In what follows, I

will be referring to student views on a range of training-related issues at a broader level. Within the case study component of the research, I elicited students' views on the "lone scholar" construct, on being part of a postgraduate community, and on participating in a disciplinary community. I was also interested in the way in which the students perceived the role of the supervisor, and in what they highlighted as important dimensions of the knowledge-making process. To this effect, I formulated a series of question clusters which the students received by email and completed in their own time.

#### 6.8.1 Being a lone scholar vs. being part of a postgraduate community

The students were emailed the following question cluster:

*What sort of support do you get with your research? Does it come mostly from your supervisor/s? The library staff? The research training course? Researchers in the Humanities are often portrayed as "lone scholars" – an image which the AHRC is attempting to modify, as noted by Linda Nordling in the opening paragraph to her Open House article in Education Guardian:*

*"Think a postgraduate qualification in arts and humanities research is lonely work? Think again. The Arts and Humanities Research Council is celebrating coming into its own this month with schemes to banish the image of the 'lone scholar' to the dustbin of history."  
(Nordling, 2005, p. 70)*

*Are you a "lone scholar" or do you feel you are part of a postgraduate community? Which of the two best describes your experience, which works best for you, and why? How does being a member of a postgraduate community relate to being a member of a disciplinary community?*

**[Question]**

It was immediately apparent, from the students' responses, that there was a variety of ways in which the students negotiated the relationship between doing individual work and participating in the postgraduate and disciplinary communities. The "lone scholar" construct was shared by the majority of students on the research training course:

*As a literature student, loneliness is inevitable. Most of the research is book-based and involves me sitting alone in a room reading.*

**[Student A]**

The research module has provided a valuable social aspect to the PhD process but otherwise I do see myself as a 'lone' scholar.  
[Student C]

The students explained the "lone scholar" construct in terms of:

- a) mode of work characteristic of the Humanities;
- b) personal preference ("As my research is conducted entirely on my own I do feel like a 'loner' but that is something which attracted me to the idea of research", [Student C]; "Being a lone scholar does help sometimes, especially when I want to give my research its full space and just let my ideas develop." [Student D]);
- c) an effect of supervision preferences ("Although my supervisor is very nice and believes in me entirely, he doesn't really ask to check up on my work regularly and assumes I can just get on and do this project alone." [Student A]).

The (lack of) correspondence between students' constructs, on the one hand, and contextual factors such as research training requirements or supervision preferences on the other, impacted on the day-to-day life of research projects.

A Modern Languages student described a completely different setting.

I never feel like a 'lone scholar'. I have tremendous support from my supervisor, who I see very regularly and often in a very relaxed environment which facilitates easy discussion both within and around my work. I also find that the community feeling of the [research training] group, whilst not helping with specific research, helps you to understand that everyone is encountering the same worries and problems, regardless of discipline. I am also extremely lucky that my PhD is a studentship on a major AHRC research project, made up of myself, another PhD student, my supervisor and four other senior academics [...]. We have regular meetings, workshops and discussions which are very social in nature. We also exchange emails, exchange works in progress for opinions and attend conferences as a group. This very much makes me feel part of a community, that I am in effect a kind of 'apprentice' being introduced to life as an academic through the group. It also gives me greater confidence about my future in academia, since I come into regular and social contact with [...] scholars from all over the country and will have several pre-arranged opportunities to present my work, both as conference papers and published chapters, to the wider community throughout the course of my PhD.  
[Student B]



This student was the only one in the group who expressed a sense of being part of a same-discipline postgraduate community (or research student culture, as described by Deem and Brehony, 2000).

The social aspect of the research training course was almost unanimously perceived as ranking above direct input into individual research projects:

the community feeling of the [research training course] group, whilst not helping with specific research, helps you to understand that everyone is encountering the same worries and problems, regardless of discipline.  
[Student B]

While being a member of the postgraduate community is important to me, I don't feel it will have any practical impact on my career prospects or help with my research much at all. But it is nice to have the company!  
[Student A]

The research training course was also a useful source of information for one student working on an interdisciplinary project:

When possible, I try to engage in discussions with my peers from other disciplines. Also, courses like the [research training course] have proved extremely helpful in providing a general overview and opening up new areas of awareness.  
[Student D]

Another benefit mentioned by one of the participants was a sense of structure in the first year of doctoral research:

Support has mostly come from the [research training course], which has given regular weekly input throughout the academic year, and has set tasks to support the development of my project, such as giving oral presentations of my research and writing a research proposal.  
[Student A]

### 6.8.2 The role of the supervisor

The students associated supervision with the following:

- the relationship between expert and novice

- a fluid relationship, changing over the course of the student's research, to accommodate the transition from student to academic
- regular meetings and setting up timelines (project management)
- someone who is able to discuss the field with you in depth (conceptual guidance, a “catalyst of creativity” [Student C])
- pastoral support
- career-related advice
- sponsoring participation in academia (“including helping you get funding, getting your work out there at conferences etc, and generally helping you to feel part of academia. This could just be by inviting you along to events or gatherings, or just allowing time to talk about things outside of your thesis, such as his own research or someone else's” [Student B]).

The image of informal apprenticeship dominated the students' views of the supervision relationship and, implicitly, on doctoral research. This explains, to a certain extent, the expressed attitudes towards the research training course, in which interaction took place from differently aligned footings than in a supervision context.

### 6.8.3 Knowledge-making as a social process

When asked

*How do you fill in gaps in your knowledge of the secondary texts you engage with (if you feel there are any gaps, that is)? Please give specific examples, if possible.*

**[Question]**

the students highlighted the social aspect of engaging with secondary sources.

I have initiated contact with other disciplines through film studies itself which, by its nature, needs to incorporate other disciplines in order to function. I feel I have a degree of useful (though perhaps basic) knowledge in disciplines that I am currently incorporating into my research (post colonial studies, globalisation) though I realise this needs to be developed. At present I fill the gaps in my knowledge by good old fashioned ‘head in the book’ study, reading and re-reading relevant texts and keeping in regular contact with those who have a degree of expertise in the fields in question.

**[Student C]**

In general, any work on literary studies involves a pro-active awareness of and involvement with other subject-areas, given the extremely wide ambit of what we call 'literature'. My previous training has already accustomed me to reading and revising my readings of secondary sources. Nevertheless, I am still apprehensive of misreading secondary sources. [...] I also use Internet forums and discussion boards to communicate with other researchers. When possible, I try to engage in discussions with my peers from other disciplines. Also, courses like the [research training course] have proved extremely helpful in providing a general overview and opening up new areas of awareness.

**[Student D]**

Whereas students' expectations with regard to the process of research and to supervision predominantly supported the two traditional constructs of research ("lone scholar") and of research support ("informal apprenticeship"), emphasis on the social nature of knowledge-construction was also present in the answers, as was openness towards cooperation across disciplines.

Some of the responses discussed in the present section echo the findings from session observation. Others open up ways of looking at the doctoral student experience in the Humanities and are used, in this thesis, as a basis for suggestions about how cross-disciplinary research training could complement discipline-specific apprenticeship. In the final sections in this chapter I summarise the underlying dimensions of a cross-disciplinary research training culture I was able to abstract from my data. Prior to that, however, I am providing a list of themes which guided data collection and analysis in the fieldwork stage of this research.

## **6.9 Sensitising themes**

Richards (2005) notes that qualitative researchers work down from their research question to create a set of categories before engaging with their data and then modify these on the basis of data analysis. The present research relied on an initial list of ten broad themes as a starting point for the analysis of case data. The themes were derived from the analysis of course documents in **Chapter 2** and from the literature reviewed in this project (see **Chapters 1, 3 and 4**). Fig. 7 includes the list of themes, with a descriptive note for each; these are revisited in this section in the light of the data collected, and are then related, in **Chapter 8**, to the conclusions of the research.



1. Subscribing to the “lone scholar” image

*The “lone scholar” image is a recurrent theme in research on the doctoral experience in the Humanities. This would presumably coexist in research students’ discourse with remarks on the need for more support. Academics involved in the training of research students might argue in favour of this view or might comment (favourably or unfavourably) on the changes in training provision since they completed their own PhDs. This is an important theme, because it underpins the uptake of the new research training policy.*

2. Developing a disciplinary identity

*It is axiomatic that the PhD experience is not only about producing a thesis but also about becoming a skilled researcher and an acknowledged member of a discipline. We need to know what the key elements in the process of developing a disciplinary identity are; how the students perceive the change of status from a peripheral to a full, legitimate member of an academic community; how identity work is incorporated into formal training provision.*

3. Training as incompatible with humanities doctoral research

*The little existing research on humanities PhD students highlights either the incompatibility of research training with the PhD process, or the inappropriateness of the skills discourse in the context of the academic Humanities.*

4. Making sense of doctorateness

*Doctorateness here subsumes a variety of elements of the PhD research experience. It refers to: an understanding of what makes a PhD thesis a valuable contribution to academic knowledge; confidence in bringing together the elements of the conceptual framework which holds the thesis together; the ability to make the most of supervisory and training relationships.*

5. Inter-disciplining

*The theme “inter-disciplining” applies to: situations in which research students cross disciplinary boundaries in their PhD projects; cases in which the students have formal training in several disciplinary areas; presenting the research to an audience with different disciplinary affiliation; questioning the suitability of a disciplinary remit in answering a particular research question.*

6. Evaluating (own) learning

*Both the students and the academics would be invited, for the purposes of the research, to make evaluative comments on the training provided. The present research starts from the assumption that successful PhD students have the ability to reflect on their own learning and to make the most of the learning situations created for them. Academics would presumably engage extensively with the conditions for a positive learning environment, even though the terms used to frame such situations may differ substantially.*

7. Conceptualising doctoral and scholarly writing

*A good understanding of the qualities of writing that make a thesis publishable develops over time, throughout the process of research, rather than being something the students bring with them to the PhD project or learn “once and for all” in the first year of research training. This category captures students’ definitions of scholarly writing; students’ awareness of the conventions of the various academic genres; the way in which academics articulate the requirements of a doctoral thesis.*

8. Approaches to writing support (the focus of sessions)

*In doctoral research, good writing is the outcome of good reading; reading the literature, making sense of the research paradigms, paying attention to the rhetorical conventions of a text. Generic approaches to writing would presumably focus on techniques for writing, structural issues or lexico-grammatical choices, whereas fine-tuned training would put forward a view of writing as knowledge-making and as integral to the research process. The academics involved in research training may adopt a variety of approaches to “teaching” students how to*



*write at an advanced level, ranging from a careful close reading and annotation of student texts to providing feedback on formal issues only, or, conversely, engaging in a dialogue about the content of the writing without offering specific guidelines about the structure of the piece.*

9. Other

*In the initial stage of the research, this was an important and productive label, in that it allowed for signalling areas of data that were intuitively relevant but that could not immediately be integrated into a coherent larger picture. Coding data as “other” was a useful way of keeping track of developments in data analysis.*

Figure 7: Sensitising themes

6.9.1 Lone scholar

While the “lone scholar” view of doctoral research in the Humanities was present in the students’ comments on their uptake of the training course, views of doctoral research as a social process were promoted in equal measure. On the basis of the students’ replies to the questions I formulated as part of the research and from the observed in-class interaction, it can be argued that formal research training provision can usefully attend to the social dimension of knowledge-making in doctoral research. (The label “social” here subsumes both loneliness and isolation as defined by Pearson (2002) and discussed in **Chapter 1**.)

6.9.2 Developing a disciplinary identity

The identity work the students were given the opportunity to perform in the context of formal research training was linked to the role of a doctoral student in a particular institutional context rather than that of a novice member of the discipline. In the student presentations and in the doctoral content sessions, which most closely approximate a discipline-specific setting, asking questions was problematic and involved complex identity negotiation. On the contrary, in the doctoral context sessions, where emphasis is not on discipline-specific content, identity work appeared to be a more straightforward matter. The questions were numerous and the topics allowed for cross-disciplinary comparison. Asking about administrative issues and research degree regulations was something that, in the words of one student, “was OK to do”, unlike when engaging with disciplinary content. The students present at the session appreciated being given the opportunity to ask questions of the person directly in charge of research students and to share with peers their experience of being a PhD student. Thus, here, identity work was linked to student status in an institution rather than to disciplinary expertise.

It appears, from the comments that the research participants made with reference to the doctoral content and student presentation sessions that disciplinary identity is



primarily linked with receiving expert feedback on one's work or presenting to a discipline-specific audience. Tension between the two strands of identity (as a member of a discipline and as a doctoral student at a specific institution) were immediately apparent.

#### 6.9.3 Training as incompatible with humanities doctoral research

The literature reviewed in **Chapter 3** suggested an incompatibility between humanities doctoral research and the discourse of formal training. The data collected as part of the main case discussed in this chapter indicate that formal research training which goes beyond the generic, transferable skills rhetoric and attends to the specific institutional context in which doctoral research is carried out is acknowledged by the students as useful and necessary.

#### 6.9.4 Making sense of doctorateness

Trafford and Leshem (2006) identify doctorateness with the development of a conceptual framework which, they indicate, usually occurs in the final stages of doctoral research. The participants in the course I observed as part of the main case (Level 2+) had not yet reached the final stages of their research projects; consequently, the data collected could not be used to illuminate this point. What the data do indicate, however, is that the research training course made the following (direct or indirect) contribution to helping the students develop a conceptual framework:

- a) a session on the thesis as knowledge-production (discussed in **Chapter 7** in this thesis) in which the lecturer offered a preview of the flow of the argument in a doctoral thesis;
- b) content sessions in which the process of research was unpacked;
- c) research metalanguage sessions which reflected overtly on the key ingredients of a research project (epistemology, methodology, method);
- d) slots in the programme in which students could present work-in-progress not necessarily in order to receive expert feedback but rather to give them the opportunity to articulate the various components of their projects.

As well as referring to the content of a doctoral thesis, however, doctorateness encompasses both the identity work associated with doctoral research and the interactions which have a bearing on thesis completion. In this respect, the doctoral



context sessions addressed ways in which the students could make the most of the supervisory relationship. Additionally, at Level 2+, the students were invited to suggest topics for the doctoral content sessions and were given the opportunity to run the student presentation sessions on their own, without convenor input, thus taking control over their own learning.

#### 6.9.5 Inter-disciplining

As anticipated, inter-disciplining occurred at various levels in the training process. In the doctoral content sessions, the students were exposed to theories and methodologies from other disciplines. Research keywords (epistemology, methodology, method) were unpacked with reference to research projects from various disciplines. The programme convenors and the individual session convenors took up both the role of discipline expert and the role of research trainer; the latter role involved stepping outside one's disciplinary territory. It also involved meeting the audience halfway by signaling relationships and possible sources of misunderstanding across the disciplines.

#### 6.9.6 Evaluating own learning

A number of the HEIs whose research training course documents were analysed in **Chapter 2** made available to the students complex training needs analysis forms which the students were invited (expected) to use to identify areas in which they would need support and to reflect on their progress. One institution required the students to produce entries for a reflective portfolio; the portfolio led to the award of a research training certificate and its completion was supported by a series of workshops, within the formal training programme, which offered guidance on fulfilling the requirements.

At the case institution, there were no arrangements in place, within the formal training course, for the students to reflect on and evaluate their own learning, beyond the first year registration process. Ongoing assessment of training needs and filling in annual progress report forms were the responsibility of the student and the supervisor.

#### 6.9.7 Conceptualising doctoral and scholarly writing

At the time when I posed, to Level 1 students, the question of how much writing they had done up to that point in their projects, the students had already submitted research proposals and had produced draft writing in support of the proposal. The answer one of the students provided was "Very little!". Further probing led to him explaining that "writing" for him meant finished, polished texts that could be incorporated into the

thesis. Drafts and informal texts were not viewed as writing as such. Furthermore, as is discussed in **Chapter 7**, the students expressed the view that help with learning how to write a doctoral thesis was expected from the supervisor. Students expected to learn how to write from feedback on their own work rather than from formal training sessions. These expressed opinions on doctoral writing (what mattered was finished, polished text, the students did not assign value to exploratory writing) and on learning how to write (with the guidance of discipline experts) prompted me to collect data from a number of formal writing support sessions in order to explore the ways in which such sessions can contribute to thesis-writing (see **Chapter 7**).

#### 6.9.8 Approaches to writing support

Within the main case, two sessions at Level 1 qualified as support for thesis writing. These sessions are discussed in detail in **Chapter 7**. The first session focused on the component parts of the registration document; the second one dealt with the flow of the argument in a doctoral thesis and did not engage with micro-level textual aspects. The two sessions can be placed at opposite ends of the writing support spectrum (writing development focusing on text structure vs support which aims to develop thesis content); the snapshots discussed in **Chapter 7** are of intermediary types of support sessions and reflect the variety of support sessions present in the course documents analysed in **Chapter 2**.

#### **6.10 The pedagogic framing of learning about doctoral research in formal, cross-disciplinary environments**

In **Chapter 1**, I introduced the two conceptualizations generally held of doctoral research (as *magnum opus* or, conversely, as research training) as well as the conceptualizations of (teaching and) learning throughout doctoral research. I put forward the view (endorsed by the literature examined in **Chapter 3**) that doctoral students' and academics' understandings of the nature of the doctorate have a bearing on their uptake of (or willingness to create) learning opportunities. The extent to which the academics involved in research training and the doctoral students taking part in formal research training courses are willing and able to meet one another halfway, I argue, depends to a large extent on whether the kind of learning that is expected to arise from such an encounter is fully understood by all participants. By this, I do not mean that what is learnt is a clearly delimited body of knowledge external to the participants and existing prior to the training session. On the contrary, the "what" of learning is

constructed in the training session with the proviso that the participants operate with similar constructs of the learning situation in which they find themselves.

At the beginning of my research I abstracted, from research training course documents from 10 universities, selected using the purposeful sampling method, three types of research training culture. These were abstract, orientative constructs which reflected differences in course organisation. The third type was defined as follows:

*This involves a year-long, faculty based course, focusing on research methods and knowledge-making practices in doctoral research. The students meet weekly or fortnightly. The course comes with certification and foregrounds the staples of doctoral research (the relationship between theory, epistemology and methodology, stages in research, putting together a research proposal, supervision, registration, the literature review, interdisciplinarity, sessions on specific methods/methodologies/theoretical stances). There is continuity from one session to another and the course convenors highlight links among sessions. The emphasis is on providing the basis for bringing together a community of doctoral students at faculty-level (a cross-disciplinary training culture, where everybody knows everybody) and on providing ongoing support at the level of research process.*

The existing research on humanities doctoral students, to which I referred briefly in **Chapter 2** (see section 2.2) and which I then discussed in depth in the literature review for the “postgraduate research training pedagogy” strand of my thesis (**Chapter 3**, see in particular section 3.3), offered evaluative comments on research training which can be read as an endorsement of Type 3 research training cultures. Consequently, I selected a research training programme which, according to the course handbook, most closely approximated the description of a Type 3 research training culture, and I conducted a case study of this programme, the aim of which was to give empirical weight to the concept of Type 3 training.

The overarching question for the case study was:

*What are the dimensions of a Type 3 research training culture?*

Setting the data collected as part of the case study in constant dialogue with the insights from the literature reviewed in **Chapters 2 and 3** enabled me to abstract a number of dimensions of a Type 3 research training culture, as evidenced in the particular course I observed. These dimensions are represented visually in Fig. 8.



From the point of view of STRUCTURE, a Type 3 research training programme offers a balanced mixture of content, context, and student presentation sessions; for students in their second year of full-time research (or part-time equivalent) and above, the balance inclines in favour of student presentation sessions, to reflect increasing degrees of doctoral student autonomy.

From the point of view of PARTICIPANT ROLES, a Type 3 research training programme presupposes the careful negotiation of discipline expert and research trainer roles, on the part of the programme and session convenors. As regards doctoral students, the roles available are those of novice members of a discipline, on the one hand, and doctoral student at a particular institution, on the other.

The successful negotiation of participant roles is interrelated with the LEARNING AGENDAS the students bring to the course. The individual learning agendas appear to have a strong bearing on the LEARNING VALUE that the students derive from the course.

A Type 3 research training programme is underpinned by the following PEDAGOGIC PRINCIPLES:

- an emphasis on collaborative peer learning, reflected in task design
- formative, rather than informative coursework: an emphasis on taking knowledge apart and seeing how it is produced, rather than on accumulating existing knowledge
- creating opportunities for reflection at various levels (individual projects, knowledge-making conventions, the process and the institutional conditions for doctoral research)
- course design flexibility (involving students in decision-making re: course structure and content and drawing their attention to their active role in research training).



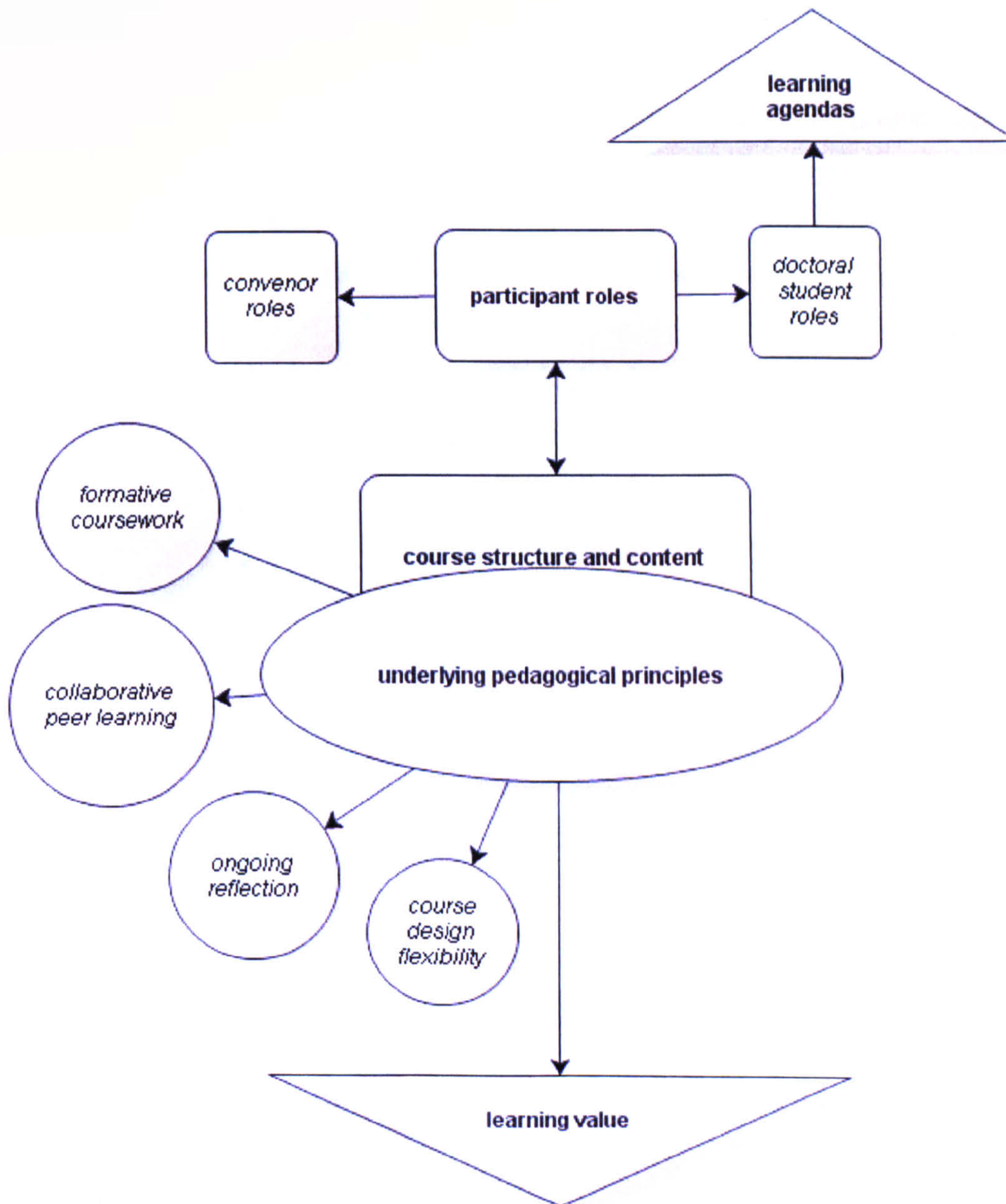


Figure 8: Dimensions of a Type 3 research training culture

### 6.11 Endpiece

This chapter has given empirical weight to the concept of a research training culture by presenting fieldwork data from a year-long research training course for humanities doctoral students. Three categories of sessions were identified within the training course: doctoral content sessions, student presentation sessions and doctoral context sessions. In the doctoral content sessions, input was provided into the processes of knowledge production in academia, with an emphasis on knowledge-making rather than on knowledge transmission/acquisition. In the student presentation session the students



were given the opportunity to take up the role of knowledge producer and share their work-in-progress with a cross-disciplinary audience. Both types of session mentioned were problematic for a number of students, who appeared to view doctoral research as discipline-specific apprenticeship and as the tacit acquisition of disciplinary expertise. The problem appeared to lie in the emphasis on deconstructing knowledge in the former type and on the lack of an audience with discipline-specific expertise in the latter. The doctoral context sessions, on the other hand, not being tied to discipline-specific content, were perceived by a larger number of students as useful. At Level 1, two additional sessions were available. These focused on writing and formed the nucleus for the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of this research.

The following chapter offers a discussion of the data pertaining to the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of this research. The two strands are brought together in the final chapter in this thesis.



## CHAPTER 7

### DOCTORAL WRITING SUPPORT IN THE HUMANITIES OUTSIDE THE SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIP

#### 7.1 Preliminaries

Writing support for humanities students, according to the AHRC, falls into the *Core generic skills* category rather than being placed in the *Subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills* group (see also **Chapter 2**). The literature reviewed in **Chapter 4** revealed that writing, far from being a generic skill, is an integral part of knowledge-making in the doctoral research process, involves a gradual increase in expertise, is inextricably linked with identity work, and cannot be divorced from the disciplinary context in which it occurs. The two views of writing mentioned here appear to be cancelling each other out. The generic skills approach takes the view that writing is a transferable skill that can be taught in a university-wide context. The discipline-specific approach relegates writing to the domain of the student-supervisor relationship or justifies support for writing in small, monodisciplinary groups. This thesis, however, takes the view that writing is a multi-faceted component of doctoral research, and that different aspects and strategies of writing can usefully be supported in a humanities cross-disciplinary setting.

Through the analysis of data from a year-long research training course in **Chapter 6** I sought to provide an understanding of the teaching and learning that takes place in a cross-disciplinary research training programme for humanities doctoral students. The data I analysed shed light on teaching and learning as they unfolded over an academic year. The two writing support sessions available within the case did not, however, yield sufficient data to build a valid argument about writing support interventions outside the supervision relationship. None of the ten institutions whose research training course documents I examined in **Chapter 2** included substantial (or sufficiently varied) writing support provision. Consequently, rather than focus my attention on one setting, I carried out one-off observations (referred to in this research as “snapshots”, *Research component 4*) in a range of different sites. Combining sites was done with a view to deriving as rich a picture as possible of writing support for humanities doctoral students, in humanities-wide cross-disciplinary settings, outside the supervision relationship.

In **Chapter 2** I indicate, following the analysis of descriptions of writing support sessions at 10 universities across the UK, the types of writing for which support was available (research proposals, theses and writing for publication), the product- and process-related aspects on which support sessions focused, the strategies for writing recommended to the students or employed in the sessions. I singled out the five most frequent codes attached to the documents to use as a point of comparison in the analysis of fieldwork data and I used the findings from document analysis as selection criteria for the snapshots.

In **Chapter 4** I summarised textual analyses of humanities academic writing which point to differences in the textualisation of knowledge across disciplines and from one level of expertise to another. I also noted that ethnographic studies focusing on doctoral writers indicate that acquiring the textual conventions necessary for the production of a successful thesis is as much a social as it is an individual activity, and that it is inextricably linked with developing a scholarly identity. Framing learning how to write as a social activity rather than as an individual process of engagement with texts requires an exploration of the roles of various participants in the process of learning how to write, whether interaction takes place between student and supervisor (discipline expert), between student and writing specialist, or in a more or less homogeneous group of students, with or without a writing specialist facilitator.

I read the studies of texts, individual writers and supervision to which I refer in the first half of **Chapter 4** alongside a number of research reports on formal writing support initiatives, which offered a most immediate point of comparison to the analysis of fieldwork data which are the focus of the present chapter. The support initiatives discussed in **Chapter 4** adopted different formats, but had in common three organisational principles/features: input from a writing specialist on textual aspects; giving the participants a common language to talk about writing; and giving participants the opportunity to articulate knowledge and/or to assess appropriate ways of textualisation. These studies, whether focusing on thesis writing or on writing for publication, explored the conditions for learning about writing and the kind and degree of expertise brought by writing specialists to formal support initiatives mainly outside the Humanities. The snapshots of doctoral writing support analysed in this chapter (**Chapter 7**) are derived from a humanities context; alongside writing specialists, discipline academics and peer students also took up the role of writing support provider.

My aim, in analysing the data related to writing support, is to shed light on the different conceptualisations of thesis writing and of doctoral writing pedagogy in the

Humanities. As well as theorising writing support, however, this thesis formulates (in the final chapter) pedagogic principles that could inform the practice of doctoral-level writing support providers in the Humanities in the UK context.

The present chapter brings together the data on writing support provision from the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand (see **Chapter 5**) and insights from the literature reviewed in **Chapter 4**. Discussion of the data in this chapter is structured as follows:

- an account of the two sessions on writing from within the main case (7.2)
- an analysis of “how to” guides (7.3)
- a brief overview of the snapshots and of the sensitizing framework I applied to the data (7.4)
- the session-by-session account of data from the thesis-writing snapshots, filtered through the sensitizing framework (7.5)
- the session-by-session account of data from the writing for scholarly publication snapshots, filtered through the sensitizing framework (7.6)
- insights provided by individual students on the process of thesis-writing (7.7).

Section 7.8 integrates the analytical categories derived from the exploration of data on writing support provision. These categories inform the discussion of research training pedagogies in the final chapter of the thesis.

The rationale behind this choice of structuring the chapter is twofold: on the one hand, it makes available to the readers of the thesis an account of what the researcher saw and took with her from the field; on the other, separating data presentation and initial analysis from the overarching analytical reframing of the data gives readers the opportunity to examine the analytical steps taken in this research. It makes visible the relationship between the data discussed here and the pedagogic principles laid out in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

The collection of data on writing support in this research was organized around a number of main questions, available in Table 3. I engaged with the first question in **Chapter 2**. The second, third and fourth questions are explored in this chapter. A full answer to the last question is provided in the Conclusions to this thesis.



Table 3: Questions for the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of the research

| RESEARCH QUESTIONS  | DATA  |
|---|---|
| What place does writing have in research training programmes and what does current provision of writing support within formal research training programmes consist of?  | Research training course documents from 10 universities                                     |
| What do the “how to” guides highlight as important for doctoral students to be aware of throughout the process of producing a PhD thesis?   | “How to” guides on doctoral writing   |
| What conceptualization of writing is communicated to the students in writing support sessions outside the supervision relationship?   | Convenor input, course-related documents, “task language”                                   |
| On what conceptualisation of learning how to write is writing support predicated?   | Course-related documents and contextual information; fieldnotes from in-session interaction |
| Given that the supervisor’s main role with reference to writing appears to be to offer subject expert feedback on the students’ work, what does formal support contribute to learning how to write at the doctoral level? | Course-related documents and contextual information; fieldnotes from in-session interaction |

7.2 The writing sessions within the case

Two sessions within the case study discussed in Chapter 6 addressed the issue of writing:

- session 1-B, in which students examined sample registration documents from previous years to familiarise themselves with the components of the documents and the expectations regarding content and articulation
- session 1-C, which looked at “the thesis as knowledge production” and the role of each part of the thesis in supporting the central claim in a thesis.

These two sessions on writing observed as part of the main case are discussed in this, separate, section (7.2). This is because their integration within a year-long training programme which addressed a range of issues related to doctoral research carries somewhat different pedagogic assumptions from those underlying the snapshot sessions discussed later in the chapter. Session 1-B, on registration documents, was led by the two convenors of the research training programme (discipline academics), who drew links between this session and previous ones and offered guidance to individual students on their own registration documents. Session 1-C, on “the thesis as knowledge production”, discussed writing from the viewpoint of constructing an argument and locating it within the appropriate debates in a discipline. Formal aspects of writing,

however, were not discussed in session 1-C. The discipline academic in charge of this session had met the students in a previous session and had invited them to present a brief outline of their research; thus, as in session 1-B, a sense of continuity with the rest of the coursework was established. “Continuity with the rest of the coursework” is a characteristic feature of Type 3 research training cultures (see **Chapter 2**). In Type 3 research training programmes, the students do not attend one-off sessions based solely on input from session convenors; on the contrary, they are given the opportunity to describe their own research, and are assisted in giving their research projects a coherent shape. The snapshots, on the other hand, were of one-off interventions and were not overtly incorporated into a year-long research training programme.

In what follows, I introduce sessions 1-B and 1-C, outline the analytical themes I developed from my observation data on the two sessions and draw methodological and analytical links between these two sessions and the other writing-related data in the present research.

### 7.2.1 The registration document<sup>26</sup> (Session 1-B)

The research training handbooks examined in **Chapter 2** indicate that the registration document is a major piece of writing the students have to produce within the first year of full-time registration (or part-time equivalent). Doctoral registration practices differ from university to university (the length of the research proposal varies, as does the process of review), but the process of actually producing the document involves two aspects which develop in close connection: making sense of the parameters of one’s research, and mastering the discursive requirements of the registration document.

The two-hour session on registration documents observed within the case was an exploratory workshop focusing on the latter aspect (discursive requirements). The convenors of the research training programme, who led this particular session, offered information on the registration requirements. Then, in pairs, the students examined (anonymised) successful registration documents from previous years from the point of view of structure and language, and formulated three aims for their own research. A whole-group discussion of issues raised by each pair closed the session. The three parts of the session (lead-in on registration requirements; pairwork; whole-group discussion) were roughly equal in terms of time allotted.

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<sup>26</sup> Also referred to as the first-year review process in some of the documents examined in the first component of this research.



The lead-in part of the session and the round-up discussion at the end brought up several important points about the registration document.

- The proposal has to contain three or four *aims*, which should be achievable within the available timescale, coherent (or related to one another), not “foggy”. Ideally, there would have to be a logical sequence of aims; a progression from a broad first aim to a narrower second one, which feeds into the third one, “which is really the main point of your research”. *Aims* may very well change in the process of the research.
  - There has to be a carefully explained *relationship between questions, aims and methodology*.
  - *Language* typical of proposals: evaluate, investigate, analyse, explicate, expand, redefine, gain deeper insight into, problematise, interrogate, critique, explore, inscribe, further understanding in the light of, consider/assess the explanatory contributions and limitations of, investigate how alternative paradigms might address the limitations of ...
  - The *rhetorical function* of the document: the aims have to be clear to somebody not within the student’s home discipline.
- [Edited fieldnotes, Session 1-B]

Looking at the session through the lens of the categories in Appendix 7b, it can be said that the session focused on product-related aspects of writing. The strategies for writing development adopted were textual analysis of “expert” texts (i.e., successful previous proposals) and reading as a writer. Writing development was framed as a formal learning activity, which relied on accessing a language to talk about writing (and about the research process).

The present research set out to investigate learning about thesis writing and writing for publication, and thus the snapshots selected in *Research component 4* did not include sessions on registration documents. Session 1-B, however, played an important part in the present research in that it offered a starting point for thinking about the value of sharing writing with a cross-disciplinary audience and generated questions for a more in-depth examination of writing support provision.

### 7.2.2 The thesis as knowledge production<sup>27</sup> (Session 1-C)

The pedagogic format of the session on the “thesis as knowledge production” was mini-lecture followed by equal time spent on description by students of their projects. In the first part of the session, the lecturer highlighted the extent to which “one can construct

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<sup>27</sup> Observation notes are included in this subsection between inverted commas.

rigorously the conventions of one's piece of work by oneself'. The first source quoted, Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method*, seemed to emphasize precisely this – the lack of universal guidelines, within any given disciplinary area, for producing and assessing “scientific” validity. Also, according to Feyerabend and the lecturer, “knowledge grows in random, accidental and arbitrary ways” and writing helps give the research project coherence.

In the abstract, rather than with reference to a particular discipline or research project, the lecturer pointed out that, in a thesis, the claim has to be consistent with the evidence produced in support of it; the originality of the thesis must be highlighted in the conclusion and, ideally, one should make one claim strongly rather than several weak/general claims. Equally importantly, he noted, one must spell out the points of reference in relation to which one would like one's work assessed. The criteria the lecturer proposed were:

- original and relevant issue to be explored (originality is “completely insignificant” if the question is “not of the remotest interest”)
  - frame of reference for the work clearly articulated
  - evidence of reflexivity
  - writing as dialogue.
- [Edited fieldnotes, Session 1-C]

The lecturer emphasized the way in which writing is a form of dialogue (with oneself, with published sources, and with one's audience). Dialogue/reflexivity, he noted, surfaces in the thesis and is a “kind of check” on the intellectual value of the work. Reflexivity helps put in a clearer light “issues of nuance” as well as assessing the fit of theory to “empirical evidence”, whereas dialogue “helps pre-empt critique”.

In the second half of the session, time was set aside for students to reflect on knowledge in the context of their own projects. Each student described their project briefly and was assisted by the lecturer and by the other students in relating the description to the main points in the session. The lecturer was more or less aware of the students' projects because he had led two previous sessions and had already become acquainted with their topics and their chosen methodology.

In drawing links between doctoral theses and knowledge production, the lecturer did not refer explicitly to the formal aspects of the process of drafting and writing. In contrast to session 1-B, which focused on formal and structural aspects of writing, session 1-C placed emphasis on ideation.



Interaction in the session relied on oral rather than written description of projects, which makes classifying the session as “formal writing support” somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, the research training pedagogy instantiated here (i.e., peer learning), and the emphasis on thesis production as a complex and convoluted process (“knowledge grows in random, accidental and arbitrary ways”), which is reconstructed and given coherence in the final thesis version, were taken forward into the research as a means of gauging the strength of the relationship between writing and knowledge-making in the formal writing support snapshots discussed in the second half of this chapter.

### 7.2.3 The relationship between the case and the snapshots

Six points of interest arose from examining the observation data from the two sessions discussed above:

- creating a space in which students are able to articulate the elements of their research projects
- examining and exploring discursive requirements (these were not presented to the students as givens; their constructedness was emphasized and the conventions in doctoral writing were unpicked through guided discovery)
- writing as a form of dialogue (with oneself, with sources and with actual readers)
- thinking about readers (the expertise of readers, what kind of feedback is expected from them, their place in thesis production)
- clarity of expression
- ideation (content) vs formal aspects (textual features, form, rhetorical shape) of writing.

The six themes listed above were repeatedly referred to during the process of data analysis when comparing and contrasting the various sources of writing support data in this research.

It was mentioned previously in this chapter that continuity with the rest of the coursework was an important aspect which differentiated the two sessions on writing within the case from the snapshots. The snapshots were not integrated in a year-long research training programme allowing for continuous reflection on and development of research projects.

In Chapter 2 I pointed out that the AHRC placed writing-related training in the *Core generic skills* category, and that the two opposing views of writing set up by this

categorization (writing as a set of generic skills vs writing as integral to knowledge-making) surfaced in both the pre-fieldwork and the fieldwork data. These data, however, did not support drawing a clear-cut distinction between the two conceptualizations of writing; rather, they invited placing these conceptualizations on a continuum. The two sessions observed within the main case in *Research component 3* (sessions 1-B and 1-C) fell close to the “writing as integral to knowledge-making” end of the continuum. The sessions described in the research training handbooks examined in *Research component 1* (discussed in Chapter 2) occupied a range of positions between the two ends. The snapshots selected for *Research component 4*, consequently, fulfilled two selection criteria. First, they captured a wider range of types of session identified in the analysis of research training documents, which award various degrees of importance to formal and ideational aspects. Second, they exemplified strategies for pedagogic framings of developing writing for scholarly publication, which the data in *Research component 3* did not illuminate.

Before discussing the snapshots, however, I present *Research component 2* (the analysis of “how to” guides). Analysing the “how to” guides acted as an analytical bridge between, on the one hand, the examination of documents in *Research component 1* and of the writing-related data from within the case, and, on the other, of collecting and analyzing the snapshot data.

### 7.3 The “how to” guides (*Research component 2*)

As was apparent from the analysis of course-related documents in Chapter 2, writing support provision in the 10 universities selected for *Research component 1* (“Documents from 10 universities”) addressed a variety of aspects of thesis writing, mostly through mini-lectures delivered to cross-disciplinary groups of students. Formal provision outside the supervision relationship did not appear to be integrated with discipline experts’ feedback on students’ own writing and, at six out of the 10 universities, was delivered as one-off sessions rather than as a series of related sessions that would indicate progression in a writing process. The documents examined, while providing useful contextual information and a set of sensitising analytical concepts, had inevitable limitations. They did not convey sufficiently detailed information about the organisation of sessions, nor did they provide an indication of the in-session interaction or students’ learning, other than through selective evaluative comments. The data drawn from documents were complemented by observation data from a series of writing support sessions (what I refer to in the thesis as the “snapshots”). In between the



analysis of data from the course-related documents and the main case, on the one hand, and the analysis of “snapshot” data, on the other, an intermediary analytical phase was inserted. This involved examining “how to” guides on doctoral writing, with a view to identifying how the guides construct doctoral research in the Humanities and what the resulting pedagogic implications of these constructs are.

“How to” guides on writing doctoral theses, to paraphrase Tight (2003), have their own story to tell about contemporary doctoral education. At the same time as giving practical advice on thesis production, they air a range of pedagogies of doctoral writing, which are of particular interest for the present research. Thus, collecting and analysing fieldwork data in the present research were preceded and informed by the analysis of a range of guides on thesis writing currently available in the UK. The following criteria were employed in the selection process: (a) wide circulation and prominence in the market; (b) relevance for humanities writing; (c) recommendation in the research training handbooks discussed in Chapter 2. The “how to” guides selected are listed in the left-hand column in Appendix 7a.

### 7.3.1 “How to” guides: Aspects of doctoral writing

The “how to” guides were initially skimmed with a general question in mind: “What do the guides highlight as important for doctoral students to be aware of throughout the process of producing a PhD thesis?”.

The guides varied in the sequencing of advice and the emphasis they placed on different aspects of thesis writing. While the last of the guides listed was aimed primarily at supervisors, it was included in the research due to the extensive references it made to humanities writing. The guides for the students addressed doctoral writing at a more general level and, in comparison to Wisker (2005), gave fewer examples from within the Humanities.

The following aspects were recurrently highlighted as important for doctoral students to be aware of throughout the process of producing a thesis:

1. acquiring an increasingly sophisticated command over disciplinary registers and thesis-writing conventions (4.3.1.1 *Language*)
2. familiarising oneself with the debates in one’s field (7.3.1.2 *Reading*)
3. gradually constructing one’s argument (7.3.1.3 *Sense-making*)
4. producing informal writing as part of the sense-making process (7.3.1.4 *Writing to understand*)

5. producing complete drafts and polished chapters as well as scholarly writing for the disciplinary audience of one's choice (7.3.1.5 *High-stakes writing*).

Each of these is detailed below, with specific reference to humanities doctoral students (where such specific information was available in the guides). Text-based research indicates that, structurally, humanities PhD theses differ from their science and social science counterparts in the way they integrate theoretical sources (e.g., Ridley, 2004; see also **Chapter 4**, section 4.2); consequently, I chose to focus my analysis of the guides on the advice they offered with reference to reviewing the literature. I started from the assumption that such advice would most readily reflect the author's views on the relationship between writing and disciplinarity and on the possible pedagogic framings of doctoral writing in the Humanities.

#### *7.3.1.1 Language*

Although the “how to” guides examined as part of this research addressed humanities students directly in only a minority of cases, overall they highlight the discipline-specific nature of writing. Craswell (2005) lists the following linguistic features to which doctoral students should attend:

- Typical terminology or phraseology being used by discipline writers.
- The language/phraseology used to describe specific procedures or methods or other processes.
- Whether first person ‘I’ is used in some parts of the text, or not at all.
- Verb tenses chosen to report on other scholars' work, or verb tenses preferred in different parts of a text, or the range and type of reporting verbs used. [...]
- Language choices. Think about how obvious, predictable, unusual, striking, effective the language is, and also the range of the vocabulary, which may become a way of extending your own vocabulary. (pp. 29-30)

The guides also emphasize the extent to which paragraph structure reflects epistemological commitments and methodological choices. The following example comments on paragraph structure in a literature review:

Each work or piece of research which is cited is summarised and discussed briefly. This discussion may only be of about one paragraph in length. At the beginning and end of the discussion, linkages with



the previous and later works cited are established. In addition, you can also comment on links with works cited in other parts of the chapter. It is often usual to provide a quotation to illustrate the summary which you have provided, or to support an argument which you are developing. (Oliver, 2004, p. 109)

Whereas this is a standard format for a social sciences literature review, it is less likely to offer a suitable template for humanities students.

Differences in linguistic and rhetorical choices are apparent not only between but also within disciplines. Within disciplines, it is sometimes pointed out, language choice is further constrained by generic conventions: “Because different academic genres have distinctive purposes, they can have different underlying conventions that affect the language, style, structure and treatment of information” (Craswell, 2005, p. 27). Overall, the guides project an image of academic discourse as highly heterogeneous.

From a pedagogic viewpoint, Craswell (2005, p. 29) advises “setting aside regular time to focus on aspects of language, style, expression and structure – perhaps an hour or two twice a week.” Wisker (2005) argues that students

need to learn the meta-discourse of research and thesis writing itself; discourse foregrounding the journey of the research, the structural principles upon which it and the final thesis are based: conceptual frameworks; mapping; ‘design of the study’; theoretical perspectives; and choices and defences of decisions made during the research, with explanations of the writer’s own context and that of the topic. (p. 136)

Wisker goes on to draw attention to the tendency, in educational and social sciences research, of foregrounding the metalanguage of research, while in the humanities this is rarely the case. She reports that:

Working with an English PhD group, I have found both an initial resistance to generic research development training because of this focus on metalanguage, and an eventual acceptance that a discipline-specific interpretation and utilisation of what it seeks to structure, discover and express can be developed. Sessions on defining research questions, on conceptual frameworks and on working towards the defence in a viva have worked well with this subject-specific group because they *can* interpret these terms as stages in their own work. (p. 136)

Stages in the research process in the humanities and the decision-making that accompanies them are not formally incorporated into the thesis (as they would be in the social sciences, where, for example, the literature review is carried out before the

fieldwork and where support for writing literature review chapter is expected to come early in the research process). This has important implications for the way in which support for doctoral writing is set up.

Learning the language of a discipline, the guides point out, is dependent upon having access to an adequate range of secondary sources, recognised as valid and put forward as representative by the disciplinary community within which they are embedded.

### *7.3.1.2 Reading*

Access (viewed not only in material terms) to and the selection of sources rely upon the students' ability to recognise and vary reading strategies according to the purpose of reading (defining reading goals, reading intensively, skimming, scanning). Successful readers of academic prose, the guides unanimously agree, recognise the various purposes in engaging with the literature and predict their information needs. Reading is discussed generically for the social sciences and the Humanities.

As well as performing a sympathetic reading of the text, following the line of argument, good readers go against the grain of what is said, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a study by comparison and contrast, identify the explanatory value of theories and assess the extent to which the theories can be applied to the students' own research. Craswell (2005) points out that:

Theories are useful for their explanatory value, and perhaps their predictive value. They can open up different possibilities in ways of perceiving and understanding complex events and happenings important in your context of academic enquiry, and so prove to be valuable tools of analysis. But they do have their limitations. (p. 35)

While attempting to understand an article in the context of the discipline that houses it, the guides note, it is nevertheless important not to fall into the trap of treating ideas and concepts as static. The guides also point out the importance of assessing the academic credibility of sources and of being wary of information overload. Conversely, "If a preliminary search reveals relatively little relevant research, then a slight change in the focus of the title may open up a number of new avenues to explore" (Oliver, 2004, p. 113).

Wisker (2005) offers a dynamic view of the literature search process:



It is perfectly possible that new discoveries or key texts will appear close to the end of their work, and students will need to acknowledge these, if only to say that they could not be incorporated into the research design because of when they were produced. This shows they have an awareness of the field, of the learning conversations taking place within it, and can see where their own work contributes. (p. 95)

Not surprisingly, reading is not discussed solely in terms of the solitary activity of engaging with printed texts. Students are encouraged to enlist the help of library staff and to “use people as informants” (Potter, 2006, p. 166). Potter notes that “indeed, probably the quickest way to find ‘where things are at’ is to ask someone ‘in the know’.” (p. 166). Ways of identifying people “in the know” are going to conferences to meet people working on similar topics, arranging interviews, organising a workshop, giving a seminar, setting up a website or joining an email or special internet discussion list. Wisker (2005) makes a similar comment:

When we ask them to go off and read certain texts or find out and forage for literature that is both absolutely fundamental and topical in their area, we are actually asking them to engage in the academic community, to enter into dialogue with work in the field, rather than undertaking a note-taking exercise. (p. 93)

### 7.3.1.3 Sense-making

The image of writing that the study guides project is not one of unproblematically putting words on paper. There is a grey, sense-making area between reading and writing. In any given sense-making moment (they recur throughout the research, see Johnson *et al.*, 2004) the researcher probes assumptions and extends the range of questions by setting primary and secondary sources in a constant dialogue. Craswell (2005), for example, advises following one’s hunches – by these she means “half-formed ideas, questions marked by uncertainty, sceptical or doubtful responses or passing intuitions about other possibilities” (p. 37). “Having such hunches come to fruition in a reasoned argument,” Craswell notes, “is the peak of treating information critically” (p. 38). It is this sense-making activity that helps the researcher work out the adequate level of integration of various sources within the analysis.

### 7.3.1.4 Writing-to-understand

Reading and sense-making, the guides generally argue, are accompanied by alternating formal and informal writing. The boundaries between writing-to-understand (informal prose) and high stakes writing (full chapters), the guides point out, are not always clear-

cut. While it is easy to identify the differences between a first-draft chapter and the finished product, different supervisors have different views of the state of an acceptable draft. Supervisory practices generally favour full-draft chapters, which the students cannot always confidently produce in the first year of research. As students are encouraged to produce writing from day one of the research, it is important, the guides emphasize, to clarify the place of writing that is not fully polished/finished within the supervisory relationship, as well as other sources of support available.

Qualitative social sciences research legitimises forms of writing such as analytical notes or memos; in the Humanities, however, the emphasis is on complete chapters and elegant prose. Taken for granted by a large number of supervisors, the requirement to produce a complete chapter (without the backbone substructure of a social science or “hard” science chapter, for example) poses complex pedagogic problems.

Lillis and North (2006) relate their discussion of drafting to supervisor feedback. Early drafts are to be looked at in terms of content, the justification of claims, the steps in the argument; later drafts should be checked for clarity and coherence. Additionally, in later drafts, the student is more likely to

take more responsibility for her own writing. This sort of development is normal in thesis writing, and you may find that you need less support from your supervisor as you become more confident about your own writing, and develop a clearer idea about the shape that your thesis will take. (p. 124)

The relationship between writing and research in the Humanities is acknowledged by the guides as complex and multifaceted:

In the sciences and engineering, the structure of writing more closely mirrors the research process and writing practices may be more integrated in research. It can be easier to see that for every research task there is a writing task. However, in the humanities and social sciences students have to invent not only their own research question and thesis structure but also find the writing practice appropriate to their work. They have to find a place for writing in their research. (Murray, 2002, p. 13)

Writing-to-understand, intermediary writing and drafts are often represented as being essential steps in constructing the thesis structure and finding a place for the research in the writing. Wisker (2005) comes closest to outlining a thesis structure for humanities doctoral research:



In the humanities, extensive reading is also required, but will be filtered into the introduction, establishing the theoretical background, underpinning theories and critical approaches. Key theorists informing the thesis will appear both in the introduction – setting the scene for research questions and major arguments of the research and thesis – and then throughout the work itself, taking different elements of the thesis argument on in different places and providing a coherent thread of reference for key arguments and ideas. (p. 95)

#### *7.3.1.5 High-stakes writing*

The high-stakes writing doctoral students are expected to produce refers to full chapters, the thesis in examinable form, and writing for publication. High-stakes writing has the purpose of conveying knowledge and displaying disciplinary membership. Doctoral examinations are discussed in varying degrees of detail in the guides. As regards writing for publication, the “how to” guides advise on selecting an adequate journal, the etiquette in dealing with editors and the process of peer review and engaging with reviewer feedback.

In contradistinction to the AHRC’s branding of writing as a set of generic skills (see **Chapter 2** in this thesis), the “how to” guides project an image of academic discourse as highly heterogeneous. Writing, the guides generally indicate, is integral to the knowledge-making process, takes different forms as the research progresses, involves social interaction, and requires feedback that is finely tuned to the particular stage in argument development that the writing serves. In the third part of this chapter, I discuss to what extent this model of writing projected by the “how to” guides is reflected in current writing support provision for humanities doctoral students.

#### 7.3.2 “How to” guides: Learning how to write as a social activity

The first reading of the “how to” guides was performed with individual doctoral writers in mind, and focused on products and processes. However, while reviewing research on formal writing support provision, it became apparent that the guides would be a valuable source of information on the pedagogic framing of these groups. Thus, I performed a second, more focused reading of the guides, with the aim of identifying to what extent and in what way learning how to write was framed as a social activity.

As is apparent from the “how to” guides table (Appendix 7a), a range of conceptualisations of writing development were projected in the guides: thesis writing as an individual process; thesis writing as learnt with the help of supervisor guidance;

and thesis writing as a social activity. In bold font in the Contents column (Appendix 7a) I have highlighted the chapters and sections (the latter between brackets) which focus on interaction with supervisors and peers in the process of thesis production. As is immediately apparent from Appendix 7a, the guides varied in the extent to which they emphasized the interactive aspects of the writing process. The “lone scholar” image of the humanities doctoral researcher (see **Chapter 1**) and its corresponding view of writing as an individual process are not promoted as the norm.

Knowledge-making and writing throughout the process of doctoral research, according to the “how to” guides discussed in this chapter and the literature reviewed in **Chapter 4**, appear to be dependent on four patterns of interaction:

1. between students and discipline texts
2. between students and discipline experts
3. among same-discipline peers
4. among students and writing specialists in cross-disciplinary settings.

Pattern 1 evokes the “lone scholar” image. Patterns 2-4 correspond to a framing of writing development as a social activity. The boundaries between patterns 2 and 3 are gradually blurred as the students’ writing displays an increasing degree of expertise. The present research explored the fourth pattern.

### 7.3.3 Brief methodological detour

From the first reading of the “how to” guides, the following codes were added to the initial list generated when analysing the research training course documents (Appendix 2d):

- academic discourse as highly heterogeneous
- academic discourse as consciously learnt vs as tacitly acquired through reading sources
- writing reflecting epistemological commitments
- foregrounding the metalanguage of research
- language to talk about content
- language to talk about the writing/research process
- the dynamic nature of the literature search
- the literature search as a social activity



- writing as encoding a fully thought out argument (“writing up”) vs writing as an integral part of research and knowledge-making.

The preliminary codes offered potentially productive angles for the review of the literature in **Chapter 4**; in its turn, the reviewing process generated additional categories and enabled the focusing and reformulation of research questions.

The analysis of “how to” guides led to the following changes to the initial sensitising framework in Appendix 2d:

- the incorporation of an additional category, namely, “aspects of thesis writing”, which in itself had two subcategories: product-related aspects and process-related aspects
- differentiating between “strategies for writing development” (local, micro-level, operational) and “conceptualisations of learning how to write” (general, overarching, subsuming the strategies)
- renaming the “conceptualisations of learning how to write” category as “pedagogic framings of writing development”, in order to provide a better reflection of the focus of the research (i.e., formal writing support provision).

Appendix 7b contains the reworked framework. This framework was applied to the analysis of snapshots of writing support sessions, discussed below, and formed the basis for pedagogic recommendations, as shown in the final chapter in this thesis.

#### **7.4 The snapshots** (*Research component 4*)

As I noted before in this chapter, the variety of writing support sessions apparent from the examination of research training handbooks (see **Chapter 2**) was not reflected in the main case setting. Thus, it became necessary to select writing support sessions for doctoral students in other settings in order fully to explore the nature, structure and pedagogy of writing development sessions at the doctoral level in the Humanities. The sessions were chosen using the method of purposeful sampling (see **Chapter 5**) and were as follows:

- (g) a two-hour session on writing essays (the “Essay and sources” snapshot)
- (h) an account of a two-hour session on literature reviews (the “Literature review” snapshot)

- (i) a one-day series of sessions on theses as work-in-progress (the “Student initiative” snapshot)
- (j) a two-hour session on editing a journal (the “Journals” snapshot)
- (k) a two-hour session on editing scholarly monographs (the “Monographs” snapshot)
- (l) a two-day event on turning theses into published material (the “Publishing doctoral research” snapshot).

Sessions (a) – (c) are detailed below in section 7.5 (thesis writing snapshots), whereas sessions (d) – (f) form the basis for section 7.6 (the snapshots on writing for publication).

Observable interaction offers a limited perspective on the complex interrelationship of literacy processes which have a bearing on the successful production of a doctoral thesis. This prompted me to refer to the fourth research component as a series of “snapshots”. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent advice given in a writing session has an impact on the production of an individual thesis, and how that piece of advice becomes sedimented in an individual writer’s repertoire of academic discursive practices. Equally difficult is to ascertain whether the advice offered by writing support providers is consistent with their practice of providing feedback on a supervisee’s writing. However, what the snapshots in this research do offer are instantiations of larger pedagogic discourses which have a bearing on doctoral writing support. The label “snapshot” also provided a useful shorthand for instances of teaching and learning about doctoral writing which varied in length, purpose and structure, among other aspects.

I refined the list of initial codes from the analysis of documents in **Chapter 2** with the help of the literature reviewed in **Chapter 4** and I integrated the codes into a sensitising analytical framework (see Appendix 2e). The analysis of “how to” guides (section 7.3 in this chapter) and insights from the literature review helped refine the analytical framework. The reworked version is available in Appendix 7b.

Each of the six snapshots was aimed primarily or exclusively at humanities doctoral students. When examining each snapshot I was interested in the following points (see also Appendix 7b):

- the *aspects of thesis writing* which formed the focus of the session, whether product-related (the thesis as text) or process-related (the doctoral writing journey)
- the *strategy or strategies for writing development* around which formal writing support outside the supervision relationship was organised



- the *pedagogic format* of the writing support session (mini-lecture, question and answer session, analysis of sample texts, analysis of participants’ own writing)
- the *stage* in the research process at which formal writing support was offered to students
- the domain of *expertise of the session convenor* (writing specialist, discipline academic, peer doctoral candidate)
- the *pedagogic framing* of the formal writing development intervention
- the *conceptualisation of writing* on which writing support was built.

7.5 The thesis writing snapshots

Below I discuss, in turn, each of the three thesis-writing snapshots I observed as part of the present research. In Table 4 I have included general information about each snapshot, namely, the area of expertise of the session convenor, the background of the audience, the length and pedagogic format of each session. The table also indicates the type of data I relied on in the analysis of each snapshot. As well as offering a brief descriptive overview of the three thesis writing snapshots, I highlight similarities and differences among them and, in subsection 7.5.4, I summarise the analytical insights from my fieldwork data on thesis-writing.

Table 4: The thesis writing snapshots

| SNAPSHOT<br>(researcher’s<br>label) | CONVENOR   | AUDIENCE<br>BACKGROUND                                | LENGTH   | PEDAGOGIC<br>FORMAT                                    | DATA  |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| “Essay and<br>sources”              | Discipline<br>academic                                     | Humanities<br>students,<br>discipline variety         | Two-hour<br>session  | Mini-lecture<br>plus q-and-a<br>section                | Session<br>materials;<br>Fieldnotes   |
| “Literature<br>review”              | Writing<br>specialist                                      | University-wide<br>audience                           | Two-hour<br>session  | Input,<br>groupwork,<br>discussion                     | Session<br>materials;<br>Email<br>account by<br>session<br>convenor   |
| “Student<br>initiative”             | Junior<br>discipline<br>academics,<br>doctoral<br>students | Humanities<br>students, mainly<br>Modern<br>Languages | 90-minute<br>session,<br>within a<br>one-week<br>programme | Discussion:<br>feedback on<br>students’ own<br>writing | Session<br>materials;<br>Fieldnotes;<br>Bid for<br>funding;<br>Notes from<br>semi-<br>structured<br>discussion<br>with one<br>facilitator |

### 7.5.1 The “Essay and sources” snapshot

The “Essay and sources” snapshot (part of a year-long research training programme for postgraduate students in the Humanities) had a highly varied audience in terms of disciplinary affiliation and first language; MA and MRes students attended, as well as doctoral students in the early stages of their research. The session was convened by a humanities academic and it addressed structure issues in essays and theses, as well as the integration of theoretical sources in the introductory chapter of a dissertation/thesis. PhD research, the students were told, is not only about producing knowledge, but also about succeeding in conveying that knowledge according to the expectations of the specific genre in which one is working.

The session started with a comparison of essay structure guidelines in two different national contexts (UK and France). Discussion then moved on to preparation for writing: the students were encouraged by the session convenor to find out “what the debates are in the field”. Successful doctoral writers, the convenor noted, are very much aware of their audience and “produce for the reader [of their work] a sense that they’re in the hands of someone who knows what they’re doing”. With regard to literary studies, the convenor highlighted the need to consider whether the audience has expertise on the particular author being discussed or on the theoretical framework brought to bear on the reading of literary texts.

The remaining two thirds of the session were dedicated to thesis/dissertation introductions. The following points were made:

- “say what you will do in the thesis”
  - “you don’t really need to prove that you know things...only put facts in the introduction which are linked to the argument”
  - “what are the key terms... work with that definition... make it work for you for the rest of the essay”
  - “lay out the assumptions which should follow from the key terms”
  - “go through the sources with an angle”
  - (with reference to theoretical sources) “the introduction may be either very exciting or very difficult and what follows may be disappointing”
  - “draft the introduction first, then re-jig it”
  - “length of the introduction: half the length of a normal chapter” (in an essay, it should be very brief, one page)
- [Fieldnotes, Convenor’s contribution, “Essay and sources” snapshot]**

As in session 1-C from the main case study, the “Essay and sources” snapshot projected a view of doctoral writing as dialogue with other members of disciplinary



communities. In contrast to session 1-C, however, the “Essay and sources” data offered a balanced perspective on writing, both as ideation and as regards the more formal aspects of shaping disciplinary knowledge into a doctoral thesis. The session convenor relied on sharing personal experience of writing. The format of the snapshot was traditional lecture – no texts were examined in class, the students’ own writing did not form part of the discussion, and peer learning was not a consciously adopted pedagogic strategy in the session.

In the “Essay and sources” snapshot the writing support provider was a discipline academic who drew on her personal experience of academic writing to familiarise the students with thesis-writing conventions. The attendees at the “Essay and sources” session were mostly students at the beginning of their research, therefore, it can be argued that the conceptualisation of writing underpinning the session was “writing as integral to the research process” rather than “writing as a final-year activity” (writing up). The implications of the session, however, given that it was a one-off intervention, was that writing support belonged primarily to the student-supervisor relationship.

### 7.5.2 The “Literature review” snapshot<sup>28</sup>

For the literature review snapshot, the data collected consisted of PowerPoint slides with session material, emails to and from the convenor and the convenor’s written (emailed) account of how the session works in practice. As the data for this snapshot do not include observation notes taken by me, I am using the present (rather than the past) tense to summarise the main points from the session materials and the convenor’s email.

The PowerPoint slides contain the following information:

- aims of the session
- points of contact for further advice
- the structure and purpose of a literature review and its place within a doctoral thesis
- questions of audience and argument
- search strategies and critical appraisal of sources
- the researcher’s voice in the literature review
- writing strategies for the literature review: summarising, paraphrasing, quoting.

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<sup>28</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the inverted commas in this subsection introduce relevant fragments from email interaction with the convenor of the “Literature review” snapshot.

The session materials suggest that the two-hour session balances convenor input, groupwork (examining literature reviews from a range of theses submitted at that university) and question and answer sections.

According to the tutor, the session is designed to work for the particular group of students to which it is delivered:

I fit the session to the group, so I always start by asking each person to introduce themselves and their Department and the main contribution made by their research to their field. This is an ice-breaker and a measure of what level I should work at.

[Email, session convenor, “Lit rev” snapshot]

The favourite pedagogic tool of the convenor is peer review: the students are invited to explain their research to colleagues, after which “they are challenged and asked to clarify obscure points”. This is because, the convenor pointed out, “it helps the reviewer and the reviewed to see what, how, and why they should be doing particular things more clearly”.

While the students attending the session come from a variety of disciplines both from within and from outside the Humanities, the pairs and groups are usually discipline-specific. According to the convenor, “This workshop is not effective if the students feel that it is too generic.”

As well as being given the opportunity to talk about their own research, according to the convenor’s account of the session, the students are invited to examine sample literature review chapters:

Examples are crucial. I always take at least one strong and one weak lit review so students can see the writing in action. They are always surprised by what others have got away with! (I take anonymous examples from the Records Office which houses past PhDs.)

[Email, session convenor, “Lit rev” snapshot]

The social aspect of doctoral research is viewed as another important component in the pedagogic framing of the workshop:

Final thought: I think *it is crucial to treat students as junior researchers/professionals, and to recognise their expertise in a disciplinary area although they are training in research*. The whole PhD process is one in which CRITIQUE comes fast and furious, but there is precious little praise. In workshops like this it is a good opportunity to encourage participants to celebrate, watch other’s



expertise and to show-case it - to counter-act the isolation and endurance test of doctoral life.  
[Email, session convenor, “Lit rev” snapshot, my emphasis]

The “Literature review” snapshot provided evidence of a more interactive session format. Rather than being overtly positioned as “source of knowledge about writing”, as in the previously discussed snapshot, the session convenor preferred a facilitator role, and, according to her account, encouraged doctoral writers to claim ownership of their projects, guiding analysis of expert texts and attending to overall identity work (see text in italics in data box above) rather than focusing solely on textual development.

### 7.5.3 The “Student initiative” snapshot

The “Essay and sources” snapshot provided data about formal writing support offered by a discipline academic. The “Literature review” snapshot focused on the viewpoint of a writing specialist. In the “Student initiative” snapshot, learning about writing took place from more closely aligned footings. The organisers of the programme were students in the final stage of doctoral research. Additionally, a large number of the session facilitators were novice academics (postdoctoral researchers at the beginning of their careers) or final-year doctoral students. The length of the programme was five days. The present research, however, focused on the sessions on one day only (Day 3). The data collected as part of the “Student initiative” snapshot consist of:

- the funding bid for the five-day programme: [Proposal for funding, “S.i.” snapshot]
- session descriptions available to students at the beginning of the five-day programme: [Programme description, “S.i.” snapshot]
- materials given to the students on the day on which the sessions were observed: [Task descriptions, Day 3, “S.i.” snapshot]
- notes from the interview with the facilitator of one of the groups: [Notes from int, Day 3, “S.i.” snapshot]
- observation notes from the feedback session on Day 3: [Obs notes, Feedback session, Day 3, “S.i.” snapshot].

In this section (7.5.3) I have divided the discussion of the data into three parts. First of all, I describe the programme (which unfolded over five consecutive days) on the basis of the written information the students received beforehand; I also outline its

pedagogic underpinnings as detailed in the proposal that the organisers put forward in order to secure funding for the programme. Secondly, I summarise the answers provided by the facilitator of one of the humanities groups (the programme was designed for both humanities and social sciences students). Thirdly, I provide an account of a one-hour session from Day 3 in which a group of humanities students and their facilitator discussed feedback on the students' own writing.

#### 7.5.3.1 Programme description and aims<sup>29</sup>

The programme consisted of alternating input sessions and workshops spread over five days. The input sessions covered a range of topics: introductions and conclusions; subheadings; productive writing processes; structuring an argument; giving and receiving feedback; copy-editing; writing for publication; and the publication process. In the workshops, according to the programme description, the students were invited to apply what had been discussed in the input sessions to a piece of writing they had submitted in advance of the course or to short texts provided by the session convenors.

A stated aim of the programme overall was to “support the further development of [the postdoctoral students'] research and mentoring skills”. Whereas the input sessions on each of the five days of the programme were led by either experienced academics or writing support specialists, it was the responsibility of the facilitators to engage with the participants' own writing and to provide feedback.

The project bid, put together by three students approaching completion of their doctorates, demonstrated a confident grasp of the current rhetoric of doctoral research training:

- develop a sustainable and transferable model of research training which can be employed by other Faculties in the University of X
- develop a research training model which will attract interest (and possible accreditation) from external bodies such as UK GRAD and Research Councils UK
- enhance the reputation of the University of X on the national and international stage as the provider of cutting-edge postgraduate research training
- provide postdoctoral students at the University of X with access to career development and mentoring activities
- attract postgraduates from outside the University of X and provide a future source of revenue.

[Proposal for funding, “S.i.” snapshot]

<sup>29</sup> Short quotations from the proposal submitted by the programme organisers in order to obtain funding for the course have been included between inverted commas in the body of this subsection.



Beyond the rhetoric (“enhance the reputation of the university”, “provide a future source of revenue”), however, one can identify a concern with creating, from below, an institution-specific research training culture from within which adequate support can be delivered. The “Student initiative” snapshot involvement in the creation of such a training culture takes the form of a partnership with strong market value potential: “made up of three individuals who share the common aim of developing bespoke training solutions which meet the needs of postgraduate researchers.” The partnership relies on advice from the university’s Research and Enterprise office.

The value of learning from peer review is highlighted in the “Student initiative” bid. In an RAE-driven culture, publishing in postgraduate journals does not appear to carry the necessary weight in decisions on whether to employ a candidate or not. The publications which count on an academic curriculum vitae in the Humanities are peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, or contributions to high-status edited collections; thus, there may be less incentive for students to submit their writing elsewhere. But in terms of the learning derived from undergoing the process of peer review (or providing feedback on somebody’s work), postgraduate journals appear to have great importance, as indicated in the data below. The “Student initiative” bid is partly based on an appraisal of submissions to the electronic journal run by humanities postgraduates at that institution:

|   |
|---|
| submissions reveal common difficulties with conceptualising and sustaining arguments, grounding these within an appropriate theoretical framework, and organising the writers’ thoughts into a logical order which assists the reader in following the discussion.<br>[Proposal for funding, “S.i.” snapshot] |
|---|

The emphasis on peer feedback at the postgraduate level and beyond raises the question of an appropriate pedagogic format for writing support sessions. The balance of formal input to activities around students’ own writing would have to incline in favour of the latter. As attendees from previous training sessions put together by the “Student initiative” snapshot organisers fed back, “providing instruction in the techniques of writing during short sessions, while useful, is not a fully adequate means of developing individual academic writing.” Thus, I chose to focus my attention on two sessions from the five-day programme, in which support was offered with regard to students’ own writing. Below I discuss the interview with the facilitator of one of the sessions (7.5.3.2) and my observation notes from the second session (7.5.3.3).

### *7.5.3.2 One facilitator's conceptualisation of writing<sup>30</sup>*

The discussion above of the programme and its aims is based on the course-related documents available prior to the session. On the third day of the programme, after attending the plenary session on copy-editing, the facilitator of one of the humanities subgroups agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview. The main questions which guided the interview were as follows.

- How would you describe postgraduate writing?
- What types of writing (and interaction around writing) help give shape to a doctoral thesis?
- What kind of writing support do English literature PhD students require?
- Could you describe your experience of thesis writing so far?
- In your view, what role does writing support play in doctoral research?
- What is the focus of the session you are facilitating today?

The facilitator, a home student approaching completion of an English PhD, noted that, in comparison to undergraduate writing, postgraduate writing could be described as “sophisticated, more complicated and confident”. This description was based not only on her experience of writing but also on her experience of teaching undergraduates throughout her three years of PhD research. The difficult part in PhD writing, she added, is “how you communicate your excitement” – making the work appeal to someone who does not necessarily have an immediate interest in the topic.

Conference papers in the Humanities, the facilitator noted with regard to the type of interaction that helps give shape to a doctoral thesis, have an important part to play in the production of the thesis overall; delivering a paper at a humanities conference frequently involves reading out a pre-written text, which closely approximates the written rather than the oral style. The dialogue around the paper at the conference (the student's own writing or the student's engagement with other papers presented), she argued, is an experience more often than not to be tacitly acquired, with minimal guidance.

The humanities students participating in the programme were history students or students working on cinema or novels in modern languages; the English students, although invited, chose not to attend. The facilitator noted that English literature

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<sup>30</sup> Notes from the interview are included in this subsection between inverted commas.



postgraduates are generally assumed to be “good at writing”; the scholarly writing conventions are “somehow transparent” to them because they “read all the time”. To a certain extent, she remarked, their absence from the course was understandable: “what can you actually realistically achieve in two hours?”.

Talking about her own written work, the facilitator mentioned that her PhD plan had changed very little throughout the three years of research. She was submitting draft chapters regularly to her supervisors, and these draft chapters were discrete units of research. In the summer of each year, she was expected to discuss her work, as part of the progress review process, with an academic who was not part of her supervisory team (the reviewers could change from one year to another). For the supervisory sessions, she handed in “a written up list of problems [she] had when writing” which the supervisors would then use as a point of reference when providing feedback. Setting criteria and taking control over the way in which the writing would be looked at gave her the opportunity to build more confidence in the direction of the project, and a stronger sense of ownership; the same degree of confidence was reflected in the response she gave to the question about the examiners of her thesis: “I’ve picked my readers”. The choice had not been easy and had involved weighing two options: an expert on the genre or an expert on the historical period. Expertise was, in the facilitator’s description of doctoral writing, the dominant theme, alongside an emphasis on the PhD as a journey of disciplinary specialisation, of acquiring a certain status with reference to a topic or area. Specialisation was not necessarily viewed as a positive aspect, particularly when presenting at conferences and not getting enough or adequate feedback because of the choice of topic. Choosing one’s disciplinary niche, it appears, may bring with it disadvantages.

Writing support, in this facilitator’s view, was an essential aspect of doctoral research training: “if I had my way it would be compulsory” she said, adding, however, that “I’m getting more conservative as I grow older”. The benefit in making sessions compulsory would be that students get “more used to exposing their writing” and learn to step back and allow the necessary distance between themselves and their work for critical appraisal. The identity work linked to putting words on paper would gradually lessen in emotional intensity. A peer-organised writing group, the facilitator noted, would arguably be the most productive format for offering writing support.

In the session this facilitator was convening on the day in which I collected data, the students were required to re-read the chapter/paper they had submitted in advance of the course, to rewrite the introduction and to use free-writing to “sort out a problem they

had in the chapter”. The emphasis was on trying out a technique that would help students fill a gap in work already written, or use writing as a way to clarify their argument and push their thinking forward. I interviewed the facilitator while the students were reworking their introductions.

#### *7.5.3.3 The “feedback on students’ writing” session<sup>31</sup>*

The “Student initiative” snapshot included a session which involved students working independently, in discipline-specific groups, on the conclusions to written work they had handed in advance of the course, while the facilitator would be available for guidance. The students and the facilitator in the session I observed, however, took the opportunity to discuss the papers overall, as a group, rather than focus on conclusions only. The choice shifted the focus from a discrete product-related aspect (writing conclusions) to learning through interaction. Peer review of a whole chapter was welcomed by the students.

In the session, the facilitator acknowledged his lack of familiarity with the topic and offered feedback on the chapter, giving the author of the chapter the opportunity to respond to each point as it was made. The other two students present contributed their own comments, which, to a large extent, coincided with those of the facilitator. In what follows, I summarise the main issues raised.

The ordering of the material in the chapter was flagged up in the session. Occasionally, “you put the cart before the horse”, the facilitator said. Ideally, key concepts should be introduced at the beginning and primary texts should be summarised and contextual information provided, instead of assuming too much knowledge on the part of the readership. Summaries should “show the text in a particular light.” The facilitator was also concerned about the lack of references after 1989; the chapter author emphasized that scholarship on her topic in the past 15 years was practically nonexistent. The facilitator pointed out that lack of academic sources on a particular topic should be compensated for by looking at how the theoretical concepts employed are being applied to similar texts or to texts from other periods or genres. One of the participants recommended an electronic resource which could help the chapter author widen her search.

Moving down to paragraph level, with particular reference to paragraphs in which secondary sources were quoted, the reviewers (namely, the facilitator and the other students in the group) remarked that they found it difficult at times to identify when the

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<sup>31</sup> Observation notes are included in this subsection between inverted commas.



writer was “saying something new” and when the writer was saying “something that has already been said”. Signposting “new” and “old” information through an adequate range of discipline-specific vocabulary can help the writer overcome the problem of “what is you isn’t clear in the paper”.

Apart from audience and authorial stance, the group discussed putting the material in an order which makes it easy for the reader to follow the argument and incorporating into the written piece stretches of metadiscourse which emphasize the value of the piece for the scholarly community: “spell things out if there is no previous work on these particular texts”. The thesis combined recovery work (the primary texts had not been looked at previously, nor did some of them exist in printed form) with performing a reading of the relationship between gender and nation in and around the texts. One of the reviewers recommended to the writer “lifting her eyes to the horizon” by examining the theory behind the gender-nation relationship.

The time allocated for the session did not allow the participants to go in-depth into a second chapter. The features of writing that the facilitator highlighted (he made it clear that “we are at the nit-picking stage”) were punctuation, the syntactic integration of quotations and the inappropriate use of pronouns at the beginning of paragraphs. It was not always clear, the facilitator noted, to what content words the third-person pronouns at the beginning of some of the paragraphs were linked.

Changing the pedagogic format of the session from individual work plus one-to-one expert-novice discussion to group peer review gave the participants access to a supportive audience who contributed to turning valuable knowledge-making into reader friendly prose. The students shared comments and expertise in reviewing papers: they worked with drafts rather than expert texts, using editing skills and playing a role in textual production as opposed to identifying features of good academic writing in expert texts.

#### 7.5.4 Features of a formal pedagogy (I): Learning how to write a doctoral thesis

The thesis-writing snapshots discussed here provided insights into writing support for humanities students from three different angles:

- that of a discipline academic with extensive experience of supervising doctoral students and a substantial publications profile (“Essay and sources”)
- that of a lecturer in academic writing (“Literature review”)

- that of doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers providing writing support in a “learning from peers” context (“Student initiative”).

The “Essay and sources” snapshot highlighted the genre specificity of the doctoral thesis and its status as a construct produced in the interaction among an individual writer, printed scholarly conversations and a number of readers with varying types of disciplinary expertise. The “Literature review” snapshot exemplified writing support which overtly acknowledges the centrality of identity work in doctoral writing. The “Student initiative” snapshot went one step further as regards writing support, by contextualising this not only as a writing development opportunity for doctoral students but also as a professional development opportunity for aspiring and novice academics (the facilitators).

The thesis-writing snapshots observed in this research attended primarily to the rhetorical shape of writing. They focused on formal aspects, genre conventions, language, thesis macrostructure. Overall, they projected an image of academic discourse as heterogeneous (and culture-specific) and recognised the convolutedness of the research process. Learning about textual aspects of doctoral theses in the writing support sessions was complemented by paying attention to the context in which the thesis was being produced. The term “context” here refers to the writer and the intended audience. In the “Literature review” snapshot, the convenor attended to writer identity, whereas in the “Student initiative” snapshot the convenor interviewed noted that formal support sessions would contribute to helping students project a more confident voice. In the “Essay and sources” snapshot the students were encouraged to read as a writer.

As well as offering a sheltered form of identity construction (see in particular the “Literature review” snapshot), the sessions were aimed at encouraging students to think of their writing as a way of joining a scholarly conversation. Participating in a conversation necessarily entails orienting to the audience, thinking about potential readers (examiners) for one’s work and choosing conversation partners with similar interests. Discussion of participating in a scholarly conversation was not framed as informal apprenticeship or discipline immersion but as overt reflection on processes and conventions associated with academic writing.

The following section looks more closely at one particular way of joining a scholarly conversation, namely, writing for publication.



### 7.6 The snapshots on writing for publication

Of the 10 universities examined as part of *Research component 1*, six ran writing for publication sessions. Two universities limited registration on these sessions to students in their second year of research or above; by contrast, two other universities (Uni 3 and Uni 10) placed emphasis on the necessity to start thinking about publishing early on in the research (e.g., “If you think you need to write your thesis before you approach a publisher for a contract think again”, Uni 10).

The convenors of “writing for publication” sessions in *Research component 1* were discipline academics (not necessarily from the Humanities), writing support staff (employed by the university or contracted to run individual sessions) or dedicated research training staff. At Uni 3, the discipline academic in charge of the sessions invited, as additional speakers, postgraduates or lecturers at the beginning of their career who had recently had work published and could provide relevant answers to questions from the audience. The snapshots discussed in this chapter were all convened by humanities academics.

One of the convenors observed for the purposes of the present research remarked that training on writing for publication is wrongly located in the final year. He pointed out that the assumption behind scheduling this kind of training in the final year is that it wouldn’t be relevant to students in earlier stages of research because, arguably, they don’t produce sufficient “proper writing” in the first two years of full-time registration. This convenor’s stated position was that training on writing for publication should be scheduled in the first year because it would help students “take apart published sources” and it would give them greater confidence in their ability to produce publishable writing.

In what follows I discuss three snapshots of “writing for publication sessions” attended by students at various stages in the process of doctoral research. In Table 5 I have included general information about each snapshot, namely, the area of expertise of the session convenor, the background of the audience, the length and pedagogic format of each session. The table also indicates the type of data I relied on in the analysis of each snapshot.

Table 5: The “writing for publication” snapshots

| SNAPSHOT<br>(researcher’s<br>label)       | CONVENOR                                    | AUDIENCE<br>BACKGROUND                                | LENGTH   | PEDAGOGIC<br>FORMAT  | DATA   |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| “Publishing in<br>journals”               | Discipline<br>academic                      | Humanities<br>students,<br>discipline variety         | Two-hour<br>session                            | Mini-lecture<br>plus q-and-a<br>section                    | Fieldwork<br>notes;<br>Handouts;<br>Session<br>description |
| “Monographs<br>and edited<br>collections” | Discipline<br>academic                      | Humanities<br>students, mainly<br>English             | Two-hour<br>session                            | Mini-lecture,<br>task,<br>discussion                       |  |
| “Publishing<br>doctoral<br>research”      | Discipline<br>academics,<br>editorial staff | Humanities<br>students, mainly<br>Modern<br>Languages | A series<br>of<br>sessions<br>over two<br>days | Mini-lecture<br>plus q-and-a<br>section in<br>each session |  |

7.6.1 The “Publishing in journals” snapshot<sup>32</sup>

The “Publishing in journals” snapshot consisted of a mini-lecture followed by a questions-and-answers section. The person in charge of the two-hour session was a discipline academic with extensive experience of editing journals and collections of scholarly contributions in his academic field. The audience consisted of PhD students from humanities disciplines in several universities.

The view of scholarly publishing put forward in the session appeared to be a context-aware one. It centred on the RAE and on the impact this had on creating a hierarchy of types of publication and on status differentiation among the journals. The session convenor introduced, at the beginning of the session, a scale of publication types in order of importance:

- (1) monographs and scholarly editions;  
(2) journal articles (refereed);  
(3) chapters in books (not refereed);  
(4) edited collections;  
(5) conference contributions;  
(6) published teaching materials;  
(7) pedagogic research.  
[Fieldnotes, “Publishing in journals” Snapshot]

After establishing the hierarchy of publications, the session convenor took three examples of journals and explained what kind of audience each journal targeted and what sort of research they were likely to publish. He advised the students to examine recent issues and first paragraphs in articles when deciding which journal to target, as

<sup>32</sup> Observation notes are included in this subsection between inverted commas.



well as the notes to contributors. Finding out what the “prestigious journals” are, the convenor pointed out, can be done by looking at where the members of academic departments with an RAE rating of 5 and above publish their work.

The convenor also noted that journals have an “undeclared policy” and specific etiquette rules. Work published in a journal, the students were told, cannot be submitted to another publisher in the same form or for a set period of time. What was communicated in the session was insider knowledge about the process: tacit, not publicly available, knowledge. The role of the convenor in the session could be described as that of a “friendly gatekeeper”.

### 7.6.2 The “Monographs and edited collections” snapshot

The two-hour session referred to here as the “Monographs and edited collections” snapshot consisted of four parts: lecturer input, task, discussion and wrap-up. It was convened by a discipline academic with extensive experience of scholarly editing. The majority of students were based in an English department. In what follows, I focus on the first two sections (input and task).

#### *7.6.2.1 The input section*

In the input section, the students were given a bullet-point list (Handout 1) which contained:

- guidelines on the role of a general editor
- rules about the process of submitting copy
- rhetorical matters: (1) audience awareness; (2) constructing an argument and presenting it in an audience-aware manner; (3) developing a strong authorial voice (“don’t let the critics/authorities speak too much for you, i.e., use footnotes”).

The session convenor fleshed out the guidelines on the role of a general editor by offering an account of his personal experience of the editing process. Then, together with the students, he went over an excerpt from Peter Redman’s (2001) guide on good essay writing (Handout 2, “Monographs” snapshot). The excerpt included the following:

- a section on introductions: purpose, format and location in the sequence of writing
- five items of advice about what the main section should include

- the purpose of conclusions and the proportion of space they should take up in the overall text.

With reference to introductions, Handout 2 (based on Redman, 2001, p. 45) provided the following advice:

Identify the subject of the essay and define key terms  
Highlight any major debates that lie ‘behind’ the question  
Signpost the essay’s key argument.  
**[Handout 2, “Monographs” snapshot]**

“Outlining the content of your core argument,” Redman (2001, p. 46) points out, “will alert your reader to what is most important about the essay, or what makes it ‘hang together’.” The “how to” guide did not appear to be prescriptive. The advice in the guide was framed as only “one way to write an introduction” and was couched in tentative language: “(if necessary)”, “(if appropriate)”.

Advice about the main body of the essay referred to choice of examples, whereas from the section on conclusions the following points were included on the handout (based on Redman, 2001, p. 73):

- recap the key points in your argument/summarize the key debates raised by the question, and try to synthesize them
  - provide a final condensed version of the essay’s core argument that restates your position on the question
  - if necessary, identify absences in your argument that could be explored in future work.
- [Handout 2, “Monographs” snapshot]**

On the one hand, using a “how to” guide aimed primarily at undergraduate social sciences students can be taken to denote a view of writing as a generic, transferable skill. On the other hand, it raises the question of whether detailed rhetorical descriptions of professional academic writing in the Humanities are available, or whether the bulk of “how to” guides target mainly disciplines outside the Humanities, perpetuating the view that writing instruction in this area is not required.



#### *7.6.2.2 The task*

The task required the students to examine four excerpts (introductions and conclusions) from scholarly studies on literary topics with the help of Handout 2, which contained excerpts from the Redman (2001) “how to” guide on essay writing. The excerpts were critical readings of different types of literary text, placing the texts in a larger cultural context. They covered a range of purposes and types of source.

- Chapter 1 of a single-authored scholarly monograph (the monograph had a separate introduction and afterword).
- Two contributions to an edited collection, with an overall introduction and with introductory sections to each of the four main parts of the book.
- A chapter in an edited collection with its own introduction.

(None of the contributions from edited collections were written by the editors.) The students were invited by the convenor to compare the excerpts and to examine various styles of scholarly prose exemplified in them. In the discussion section, the students had the opportunity to hear their peers’ evaluation of the excerpts.

The task exemplifies one particular writing development strategy to which I am referring as “reading as a writer”. Taking into account the two main parts of the session (mini-lecture on the process of editing monographs and task focusing on rhetorical aspects of scholarly writing) it can be argued that the session convenor took up two roles: that of a friendly gatekeeper and that of an expert reader.

#### 7.6.3 The “Publishing doctoral research” snapshot<sup>33</sup>

The two-day course which formed the basis of the “Publishing doctoral research” snapshot was a formal intervention initiated by academics, prompted by and responding to policy developments, according to the information circulated to participants beforehand and reiterated in the introductory session, and externally funded. It was offered to students across the UK and it brought together speakers from a number of higher education institutions. The round-table discussion at the end of the second day was intended to give the speakers the opportunity to compare their views on writing for scholarly publication and further to emphasize what they saw as important points for novice writers to keep in mind when submitting work to editors and publishers (see 7.6.3.2).

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<sup>33</sup> Observation notes are included in this subsection between inverted commas.

The “Publishing doctoral research” snapshot projected an image of publishing in the Humanities as a way of taking part in a scholarly conversation and addressed the process of having academic work published from multiple viewpoints.

#### *7.6.3.1 Programme description*

The first day placed emphasis on publishers’ viewpoints and covered generic issues and technical matters regarding what happens before and after submission (e.g., book proposals, submitting an article to a journal, preparing camera-ready copy, electronic publishing). Speakers on Day 1 included a journals commissioning editor and a publisher, as well as two speakers with expertise in online publishing and two academics. The speakers on the second day were academics involved in the editing and peer review process, who talked about the intellectual and conceptual work involved in writing for publication, as well as about the value of publishing in the academic context. Day 2 was organised into breakout rooms based on disciplinary strands. The leaflet advertising the conference offered an orientative template for Day 2 (e.g., Session 1 – “What shall I do with my thesis?”, Session 2 – “The monograph”, Session 3 – “The journal article”). While the printed timetables indicated that this template was generally followed across the discipline strands, my notes from the Modern Languages strand show some overlap among the sessions.

Day 1 speakers addressed a multidisciplinary humanities audience; the modern languages sessions which I attended on Day 2 brought together a small number of students from a variety of language departments, working on linguistic, literary, filmic or cultural issues. The size of groups on Day 2 ranged between eight and 23 participants; the Modern Languages group included eight participants.

As this research is concerned with the relationship between writing support and knowledge-making, I focus on the academics’ viewpoint on the process of academic publishing and I am referring mainly to my notes from Day 2. Day 2 consisted of four forty-five minute sessions, led by discipline academics, who had varying degrees of expertise as editors and reviewers but a substantial (RAE-able) publications profile. The speakers were at different stages in their academic career. At the end of Day 2, the four disciplinary strands were brought together for a roundtable discussion. Two of the four academics from the Modern Languages strand attended two or more of the other sessions on Day 2 and engaged in a dialogue with the speakers, thus ensuring continuity from one session to another.



*7.6.3.2 Day 2: Recurrent issues across the four strands*

The dialogue among speakers on the second day and the round table discussion at the end were extremely useful for the research in that they supported the comparison of different outlooks on the publication process as well as identifying common themes and salient points of interest. As indicated on the handouts provided throughout Day 2 and confirmed by my fieldnotes from the sessions and round table discussion, the following issues about publishing were raised by experienced and newer discipline academics.

- The students were advised to make their first piece of published work “typical of your research”; building a coherent publication profile was deemed important, as was establishing expertise in a specific domain.
- The RAE was a recurrent theme on the second day. One of the speakers mentioned “the magic number of 4” (academics participating in the exercise are expected to submit four publications for examination by a panel).
- A “pecking order” of publishing houses was identified by speakers across the sessions.
- Financial issues (subvention for publication) were included in the discussion.
- A small number of journals “make it their policy not to publish work by postgraduate students”.
- The importance of peer review was highlighted by the speakers as a fundamental practice in academia.
- One criterion for selecting a journal in which to publish, or an edited collection, is to check whether the work will be listed in the MLA database.

The bullet points above summarise the issues that were common to the four parallel strands on Day 2 and that appeared to reflect the dominant discourse of writing for scholarly publication held by humanities lecturers and researchers in the current academic climate in the UK (in the running up to the 2008 research assessment exercise). The following section (7.6.3.3) refers specifically to the strand I attended on Day 2.

*7.6.3.3 Publishing in the Modern Languages*

As mentioned further above, the Modern Languages strand on Day 2 included four consecutive speakers. My observation notes indicate that two of the four speakers attended several sessions and participated in the discussion in each session. Here I

summarise, on the basis of my observation notes, issues specific to publishing in the Modern Languages and which were not repeated in the round table discussion at the end of Day 2.

One issue which was flagged up as controversial in the field of modern languages was publishing and presenting at conferences in the language studied (e.g., French, German, Spanish, etc.). One of the speakers noted that she had applied for an academic position after completing her doctorate but that, although the interview panel were overall satisfied with her publications output (in English) and her teaching profile, they appointed a candidate who additionally had experience of publishing in the language studied.

Although the speakers repeatedly emphasized the link between publishing and career progression, and the implications this had for selecting an appropriate outlet for one's writing, they did not neglect other forms of writing. Encyclopaedia entries, electronic publishing, an on-line presence (achieved through setting up a website on the author studied and paying careful attention to the metadata) were put forward by the speakers as ways of signalling one's area of expertise and making contacts in one's (sub)field.

Starting and building a publications profile, all four speakers on Day 2 agreed, would ideally have to take place in parallel to thesis production. Chapters or conference presentations, for example, could form the basis of a journal article. The students were advised to select a postdoctoral project that fits into university courses and were encouraged to produce a monograph that "sells".

#### 7.6.4 Features of a formal pedagogy (II): Learning how to write for publication

Casanave and Vandrick's (2003) edited collection on writing for scholarly publication juxtaposes accounts by individual writers on the experience of publishing with those of gatekeepers. Emphasis is placed, in both cases, on participation in the academic publishing community. The only contribution that is structured as a learning dialogue rather than offering an account of unmediated participation, is made by a graduate student and her supervisor (Lee and Norton, 2003); the situation they describe is again modelled on a view of learning as informal apprenticeship rather than as formal, structured learning. The "writing for publication" snapshots, on the other hand, exemplify not informal participation but organised induction.

Overall, the three "writing for publication" snapshots addressed the following issues: features of the scholarly publishing culture (the RAE, the "undeclared policy of



a journal”, a hierarchy of publication types, journals, and publishing houses); pre- and post-submission procedures (the peer review process, intellectual property rights, financial issues, submission etiquette, the role of editors); textual aspects of published and publishable writing; and the relationship between publishing and developing a scholarly identity.

On the basis of the data discussed in 7.6, it can be argued that the convenors took up the following roles:

- *friendly gatekeeper*: they communicated insider knowledge about the culture and institutional context of scholarly publishing, and offered guidance on the process;
- *expert reader*: they gave an expert reader’s perspective on textual aspects and guided students’ “reading as a writer”;
- *“I’ve been there”*: they related their own publication history.

Both the thesis-writing snapshots and the writing-for-publication snapshots addressed a mixed audience of humanities doctoral students. In the writing-for-publication snapshots, however, in contrast to the thesis-writing ones, all session convenors were discipline academics. I chose to focus on sessions convened by humanities academics in order to gain insights into the way in which insider experts construct for novices the process of writing for publication. The writing-for-publication support initiatives reviewed in **Chapter 4** (section 4.6.2) were convened by writing specialists or educational developers and fell into Torrance *et al.*’s (1993) generative writing course category. By contrast, the writing-for-publication snapshots I discuss in this thesis did not involve producing writing and focused mainly on demystifying the culture of writing for academic publication (the “Publishing in journals” and the “Publishing doctoral research” snapshots) or analysing rhetorical aspects of published texts (the “Monographs and edited collections” snapshot).

## 7.7 Student voices

During the process of data collection from the main case, discussed in **Chapter 6** and in section 7.2 in this chapter, I emailed, to the students taking part in the research training course, questions prompted both by the literature and by the ongoing process of data collection and analysis. Four students provided answers to two questions related specifically to doctoral writing; the answers are discussed in this section. The two sessions on writing from within the main case were designed for first-year research

students and took place in the first half of the academic year; the participants' emails were collected in the second half, when the students had written their registration documents.

The answers the four students provided illustrate different trajectories towards and beyond registration in the first year of full-time research. All the students from the group to which the four participants belonged were required to produce a registration document, for which they received support from their supervisors and from the research training programme convenors. The latter guided a group discussion of textual features of successful registration documents from previous years (session 1-B, discussed in section 7.2 in this chapter). They also met with students on an individual basis and provided feedback on the students' draft registration documents. Between the beginning of the academic year and the registration meeting (two-thirds to three-quarters into the first academic year), the students were given the opportunity to describe and articulate the shape of their projects to and with the help of an audience comprised of peer doctoral students and humanities academics (from the same or a different discipline). All four students who provided the answers discussed in this section successfully completed the registration exercise.

The two writing-related questions (more accurately, question clusters as indicated below) elicited participants' views on the doctoral writing process in general and on their experience of doctoral writing up to that point. Answers from individual participants were sought as a complement and point of comparison to fieldwork notes on writing support sessions.

#### 7.7.1 Immersion in the discipline vs formal teaching

The facilitator of one of the groups from the "Student initiative" snapshot, who was nearing completion, painted a complex picture of the interaction surrounding thesis production (see section 7.5.3.2 in this chapter). She was receiving feedback on her writing both from her supervisory team and from others (the discipline academics involved in the yearly review process, or peer students and academics at conferences). The undergraduate teaching (and essay marking) she was doing gave her the opportunity to consciously reflect on textual aspects and writing practices. Participating in a formal writing support programme, she noted, was another way in which writers can be supported in cultivating an adequate level of detachment from their texts and developing an awareness of writing as text (rhetorical shape) as well as texture of ideas (ideation).



This view of writing as a social activity involving both dialogue about the texture of ideas and attention to the shape of the text stands in contrast to the answers that first-year students from the case discussed in Chapter 6 provided to a question I posed about how one learns how to write at doctoral level. The question (emailed to the students) was worded as follows:

*Susan Peck MacDonald (Professional Academic Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1994, p. 189) writes:*

*“there still remains the question of how to initiate students into the appropriate stage. Berkenkotter and Huckin caution that genre knowledge is situated knowledge, best “picked up” through immersion, rather than taught. Kate Ronald’s account of students’ anxiety when asked, as outsiders, to analyse unfamiliar disciplinary conventions should serve to reinforce the caution Berkenkotter and Huckin express; it is entering the disciplinary conversation, rather than analyzing its conventions, that leads to understanding.”*

*To what extent does this reflect your experience of learning how to write at PhD level? How does one learn how to write a PhD thesis?*

**[Question 7]**

As the participants in my research were doctoral students in the Humanities, thoroughly familiar with close textual analysis and with academic writing conventions, I chose to phrase the question using the academic discourse register. I introduced the question with a quote from one of the main sources in my research. The quote illustrated the tension between immersion and participation in a scholarly conversation, on the one hand, and formal, explicit teaching of writing, on the other, a tension highlighted in the studies I reviewed for this project.

The answers the students provided emphasized immersion over the formal teaching of thesis-writing conventions. “I’m not sure one can learn how to write a PhD thesis,” a Modern Languages student argued, adding that

One is introduced to its conventions by the supervisor and steered through the various progressions by such exercises as the [registration process], but ultimately the research finds its way as it progresses. The supervisor is there to steer the organically developed research into a recognisable PhD thesis.

**[Student B]**

The interaction around thesis-writing, in this student's view, has primarily to do with participating in scholarly conversations:

I have been given a lot of freedom by my supervisor to find my own way into the thesis according to how my thoughts have developed whilst immersing myself in the source material. Through the project discourse, I have also been immersed into the 'disciplinary conversation' and have found that my confidence has grown as the year has gone on, and as I have begun to feel part of the 'conversation' rather than just listening to it.  
[Student B]

The confident voice is projected in the text from the outside, rather than being constructed through successive writing.

An English PhD student replied: "Difficult question! I still don't have an answer to that one! All I can say is that it is an ongoing process for me" [Student D]. Writing, in his view, appeared to be an individual activity: "I believe that putting my ideas on paper gives me a better perspective on my work, especially when I revisit it later" [Student D]. Student C (Modern Languages) put forward a similar view: "continual practice, and critical analysis," he "would guess", is what helps develop a thesis.

The students' answers varied in the extent to which thesis writing was seen as an individual activity, as an activity to be guided ("steered") by a supervisor, or as a complex undertaking involving interaction with various other participants in institutional and disciplinary discourses.

Student A was against unguided immersion:

It's true that immersion can aid understanding and improvement of one's own writing technique, but only if that immersion is an experience of critical, reflexive response to other academics' work. Otherwise, it is useless. You could read the same article twenty times and be no wiser about its style, structure and content. You have to be directive in your reading of academic examples and apply a process of analysis that leads to a conscious understanding of how they have been written - this is first and foremost a conscious competence which later becomes unconscious competence through practice. This has been shown to be the case with learning to drive or learning a foreign language - why should academic writing be any different? But such a critical approach to reading and imitating previous writers is something that can and should be taught, for example on a research training course.  
[Student A]



Of herself, however, she writes:

My confidence as a writer has more to do with me as a person (I would characterise myself as ‘a writer’) than with any research training I have received. It may also be related to [...] the fact that I have been writing diaries, poetry, academic essays, letters etc. almost daily since I was about 10!  
[Student A]

While some formal writing support outside the supervision relationship was available at the point of registration, it was neither provided nor expected in relation to thesis writing. None of the four students mentioned participation in a formal workshop as a means of learning how to write a doctoral thesis. The view of writing projected by the answers discussed here is consonant with what the literature reviewed in **Chapter 4** argues, namely, that doctoral writing involves a higher degree of expertise than pre-PhD academic writing. They also suggest that it is integral to knowledge-making (as opposed to being seen as a generic skill taught outside the discipline). The lack of references to writing support outside the discipline/supervision context, however, problematise the extent and value of thesis-writing support in cross-disciplinary research training cultures. This is not to say that writing support should not be made available; on the contrary, the answers endorse a call for particular attention to students’ learning agendas and expectations when designing research training programmes.

### 7.7.2 Writer profiles

As well as asking the students about the way in which they expected writing to be supported, I was interested in how their own writing was progressing in the first year of full-time doctoral research. I formulated the following question cluster:

*How much (and what kind of) writing have you done so far? How do you feel about your writing at this stage? Why?*  
[Question 9]

Unexpectedly, none of the four students mentioned the registration document; they interpreted “writing” as referring to the thesis only. To the first question, they provided the following answers:

- I’ve made copious notes for the first chapter of my thesis, but have not produced an actual draft in continuous prose. [Student A]

- Very little. I am quite an obsessive planner and find it very difficult to write ‘as I go along’. [...] I do feel very anxious about the fact that there is no discernible ‘output’ at this stage. [Student B]
- At this stage my writing is in a very basic, almost note taking form that has yet to materialise into anything useable as text for the thesis. [Student C]
- I have started work on my introductory chapter and have completed the penultimate section. [Student D]

Torrance *et al.* (1994) divide students into “writers” and “planners”. Student D, who had produced a draft chapter, falls into the “writer” category. Student B takes the opposite approach to writing: “I am quite an obsessive planner and find it very difficult to write ‘as I go along’. I like to know exactly how the entire piece will be structured and develop before I start”.

Student C, who hadn’t yet produced a chapter draft or coherent prose text to be included in the thesis, took the view that “I lack the expert knowledge to commit anything to a first draft. I believe I have a significant amount of background reading and research to conduct still”. The passage from notes to continuous prose, in the case of student C, is dependent on developing a suitable level of confidence in one’s ability to produce knowledge as well as an adequate command over the background sources. Student A had already produced a paper which had been accepted for publication; similarly, student B was intending her first proper written output to come in the shape of an article or a conference paper.

The data collected here confirmed Torrance *et al.*’s categorisations of students on the basis of stages in the writing process. A yet more relevant contribution, however, to the discussion of the relationship between writing and knowledge-making, is the way in which they positioned themselves within their home disciplines. Student C placed himself at the periphery of his disciplinary community. Both student A and student B had a higher degree of confidence in establishing a written presence within the disciplinary conversation in which they were aspiring to take part.

## 7.8 Discussion

This chapter has presented the fieldwork data on writing support provision in the present research. It opened with the two writing support sessions from within the main case (*Research component 3*), to which I applied the initial sensitising framework (Appendix 2e) based on the codes attached to the research training documents analysed in Chapter 2. Next, I discussed the “how to” guides (*Research component 2*). The case



writing support sessions and the “how to” guides contributed to refining the sensitising framework (Appendix 7b), and to formulating questions to ask of the snapshot data. The snapshot data were the focus of sections 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6. I then returned to the main case (*Research component 3*, section 7.7) and collated the views that a number of participants in the main case put forward with reference to the process of learning how to write, and their expressed positioning as writers/members in their respective disciplines. The present section shifts the focus from accounts of sessions and preliminary analysis to synthesis of analytical themes.

The fieldwork component of the “doctoral writing pedagogy” strand of this research was designed in order to provide an answer to the question

*What is the role research training plays in supporting doctoral writing (outside the supervision relationship)?*

Throughout the analysis of data from the snapshots I considered the following points:

- What conceptualisation of writing is communicated to the students in the writing support sessions?
- On what conceptualisation of learning how to write is writing support predicated?
- Given that the supervisor’s main role with reference to writing appears to be to offer subject expert feedback on the students’ work, what roles are associated with formal writing support providers in cross-disciplinary settings?

In what follows I discuss each of these questions in turn.

Existing research on academic writing identifies three views of writing in the context of undergraduate study: writing as skill, writing as transparent medium of representation and writing as knowledge-making. In **Chapter 4** I discussed this with reference to doctoral writing. These three views, which have implications for the way in which writing is taught, are reflected in descriptions of writing support provision (see **Chapter 2**, section 2.5.2). Through my analysis of fieldwork data on writing support provision I sought to further differentiate among conceptualisations of writing. The pairs which resulted from integrating insights from the literature and from the analysis are listed in Fig. 9.

| <i>Writing as</i>                       | <i>Writing as</i>   |
|---|---|
| discipline-specific knowledge-making vs | a set of decontextualised skills                                      |
| individual activity vs                  | social activity (emphasis on interaction and feedback)                |
| inspiration vs                          | craft (actualising generic templates)                                 |
| process vs                              | product   |
| integral to research vs                 | writing up (encoding a fully thought-out argument)                    |
| ideation vs                             | rhetoric/textualisation   |
| text production vs                      | joining a scholarly conversation (developing a disciplinary identity) |
| monologue vs                            | dialogue  |

Figure 9: Conceptualisations of writing

These conceptualisations are reflected in session convenors’ accounts of the writing process and of the features of a doctoral or publishable text. They underpin the choice of writing support strategies in each individual session. They also appear to inform the overarching pedagogic frameworks of writing support discussed below and, arguably, they have a bearing on students’ uptake of formal writing support provided.

I have presented the conceptualisations of writing in binary pairs in order to convey the contrast between opposing views on both textual and process-related aspects. This is not to say that the members of each pair necessarily cancel each other out. Several views of writing coexisted in each writing support snapshot, each being foregrounded or backgrounded depending on the focus of the session.

The second question for *Research component 4* led to the identification of the following conceptualisations of learning how to write, which underpinned writing support provision in the snapshots:

- attending to the rhetorical structure of a piece of writing and learning through textual analysis
- refining writing through conversations with discipline peers
- turning writer-based prose into reader-based prose (learning from feedback)
- taking control over the process of learning how to write (learning through reflection on own writing experience and expertise)



- learning through establishing a degree of critical distance between oneself and one's writing
- supporting the development of reader-based prose through peer review
- expert demystifying publishing culture for novice.

Lastly, the roles took up by convenors of writing support sessions were as follows:

- discipline expert making rhetorical knowledge explicit (assuming rhetorical structure common to humanities disciplines)
- writing specialist facilitating discussion about rhetorical structure of text samples and about micro strategies for textual construction (paraphrasing, summarising, quoting)
- discipline novice acting as peer reviewer and supporting the development of students' own writing into reader-based prose
- discipline expert making tacit knowledge about the publication culture available to students (insider knowledge)
- discipline expert facilitating analysis of published texts on the basis of guidelines of rhetorical structure
- discipline experts contextualising academic publishing from the academics' viewpoint (relating publication to career issues).

Overall, the thesis writing sessions examined in the present research were not remedial and projected a view of writing as central to discipline knowledge-making. At the same time, however, formal support did not appear to displace supervisors from their central role in enabling doctoral students to develop as writers. As concerns the writing for publication snapshots, support for knowledge-making and writing did not attend to individual projects. It looked beyond the doctoral research context to becoming a published author and legitimate member of a discipline. It projected a view of knowledge-making and writing as a set of socio-cultural practices which contribute to the regeneration of disciplinary communities.

## **7.9 Endpiece**

The writing support sessions I have discussed in this chapter have allowed me to identify a number of conceptualisations of writing. I have also abstracted, from the data,

the pedagogic framings of writing development activities and the various roles that the convenors of writing support sessions took up. The data were drawn entirely from writing support sessions aimed primarily at humanities doctoral students in humanities-wide cross-disciplinary settings. Thus, the participants were neither able nor expected to draw on subject matter expertise when offering feedback on each other's writing. The conceptualisations of writing, pedagogic framings and convenor roles identified are formulated at an intermediary level of generality, between higher order views on writing put forward in the literature (generic skill, transparent medium of communication, or writing as an integral part of knowledge-making, see **Chapter 4**) and practical tasks and activities for use in writing support sessions. They reveal options available to convenors of writing support sessions for humanities doctoral students.

Taken together, the two writing support sessions from within the case and the six snapshots point to the multifaceted and complex nature of doctoral writing. They also indicate a number of ways in which doctoral writing can be developed in contexts where subject matter expertise is not a resource on which participants can draw. In this chapter, I used the insights from document analysis in **Chapter 2** (and section 7.3) and from the review of the literature in **Chapter 4** to examine ways in which doctoral writing is talked about and the pedagogic activities aimed at supporting doctoral writers. In the following chapter, which concludes the thesis, I synthesize my findings from the case study (**Chapter 6**) and from the snapshots, consider their implications for designing research training programmes, and make suggestions for further research.



## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 8.1 Chapter preview and preliminary notes

The closing chapter in this thesis re-emphasizes and braids together, in section 8.2, the findings from the two strands in my research (the postgraduate research pedagogy strand, and the doctoral writing pedagogy strand, respectively). The overarching question to which my research provides an answer was formulated as follows.

*How do official/formal research training cultures (outside the supervision relationship) contribute to supporting knowledge-making and writing practices in humanities doctoral research?*

In order to arrive at a complex and carefully considered answer, the postgraduate research pedagogy strand addressed mainly support for knowledge-making, whereas the doctoral writing pedagogy strand focused specifically on thesis writing workshops. The findings are discussed in relation to their implications for both practice and research. Section 8.3 considers the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for further research. The chapter closes with a statement of the position this thesis claims for itself in the ongoing debate on doctoral research training.

My research has aimed to inform a dual audience – researchers and practitioners in the field of doctoral education – on the grounds that, in an education context, research ultimately verifies its value by the way in which it can contribute to practice, while good practice is self-reflexive and invites ongoing research. Thus, some of the findings at which I arrived in the research speak to practitioners, as guidelines for the design of research training programmes, whereas others have been formulated as theoretical insights, as potential starting points for future research.

#### 8.2 Research findings revisited and their implications for research and practice

In the Humanities, doctoral education is primarily governed by a view of research as a “lone scholar” endeavour and by a view of research training as non-formalised, discipline-

specific apprenticeship. In my research, I have sought to explore how knowledge-making and writing, the two central components of doctoral research, can be supported in a cross-disciplinary, formal training environment. The findings, revisited below, make a substantial contribution to the literature on doctoral training; this contribution consists of an enhanced, research-grounded understanding of the teaching and learning taking place in a cross-disciplinary research training context.

### 8.2.1 The postgraduate research pedagogy strand

In line with the view of pedagogy underpinning this research, my data from the training programme captured the teaching and learning that arose in the interaction among the various course participants. The training programme data yielded a set of findings that have important implications for both research and practice related to doctoral research training. These findings and their implications are discussed below.

The training programme I selected for observation was structured into three main areas: sessions on specific research approaches or on general key concepts or areas of research which had the potential to feed directly into the content of individual theses; sessions on the institutional context of doctoral research; and sessions in which the students had the opportunity to present work in progress. My research found that the participants viewed the balance of sessions as beneficial to their research. This confirms that doctoral research is a multi-faceted process whose success is linked with a thorough understanding of not only knowledge-making and writing practices but also institutional requirements and expectations. On the basis of this finding, my thesis argues that institutions which have the resources to mount this kind of programme should consider interspersing sessions that address the three areas referred to.

A second finding related to participant roles. The view of pedagogy underpinning my research invited a consideration of identities constructed in the teaching and learning process. In the process of research I identified two distinct roles played by programme and session convenors: the discipline expert and the research trainer roles. The latter, while clearly essential in offering adequate support to doctoral students, was unevenly taken up by the academic staff involved in the training programme. My research has signalled the importance of differentiating between the two roles and is offering a point of departure and of comparison for further exploration of the ways in which academic staff perceive the role of training research students outside individual supervision. With regard to doctoral



students' roles, this thesis found that in the formal training programme more students felt at ease when asking questions about the institutional aspects of doctoral research than when being positioned as novice members of their home discipline. The conclusion that logically follows from this finding is that while formal training programmes of the type discussed in this thesis do have an input into the knowledge-making and writing necessary for producing a doctoral thesis, their most immediate impact on doctoral researchers is to help them develop a set of constructs about the process of doctoral research.

Adopting a specific participant role, my research found, was closely interrelated to the learning agendas the students brought to the course (i.e., the expectations that doctoral students had about the learning they hoped to achieve from the course) and the learning value they derived from each individual session or from the programme overall. My data indicate that peer learning in cross-disciplinary settings appears to involve not the accumulation of subject knowledge through discussion with peers but development of and reflection on individual projects through discussion of the projects with the peer audience. For example, in the content and student presentation sessions the data show that the audience contributed not discipline-specific expertise but the opportunity for presenters to “think out loud” and try out various ways of constructing and expressing arguments. These findings give additional weight to the statement (put forward in **Chapter 1**) that there is a noticeable tension between discipline-specific research cultures and cross-disciplinary research training cultures. They warrant a call for research training convenors carefully to examine and explain the parameters of the learning situations in whose design they participate.

Finally, in the postgraduate training pedagogy strand, my research identified four overarching pedagogic principles governing the teaching and learning interaction in the humanities-wide cross-disciplinary training programme observed, as follows. The programme placed emphasis on collaborative peer learning, an emphasis reflected in the design of activities in which the students were invited to engage. The coursework was predominantly formative (rather than informative); the students were invited to take knowledge apart and see how it is produced rather than accumulate existing knowledge. Opportunities for reflection were built into the course at various levels (individual projects, knowledge-making conventions, the process and the institutional conditions for doctoral research). Course design was viewed as flexible; the students were involved in decision-making about some of the course structure and content and the programme convenors

repeatedly drew the students' attention to their active role in the research training. These pedagogic principles capture the dynamics of teaching and learning in a humanities-wide cross-disciplinary research training programme and have important implications both for further research into and for the practice of doctoral research training.

### 8.2.2 The doctoral writing pedagogy strand

In the postgraduate research pedagogy strand, analytical insights were derived from one individual (typical) case of a research training programme. The doctoral writing pedagogy strand, by contrast, focused not on abstracting pedagogic features from an instance of educational practice, but on exploring ways in which features of writing support initiatives from a number of different settings could be imported into a substantial, year-long training programme of the type explored in the previous strand.

The existing literature on formal writing support for doctoral students consists mainly of presentation and discussion of writing support workshops in the Australian context by developers organising these workshops. What my thesis brings new to the debate is a consideration of formal writing workshops in the UK postgraduate Humanities. My research compared a number of workshops from the vantage point of an outside researcher, rather than that of the practitioner involved in designing and delivering the programme, and filtered the findings through insights from the combined perspectives on doctoral writing synthesized from the studies reviewed in **Chapter 4**. The outcome of my research is an enhanced understanding of pedagogic decisions made about writing at doctoral level in the Humanities. Exploring the nature of writing support for humanities doctoral students yielded both an understanding of the current writing support landscape and opportunities to theorise writing support more generally.

Thus, in the doctoral writing pedagogy strand, this thesis problematises the place that writing support is given in formal research training programmes. The document analysis of writing support descriptions in research training programme overviews (**Chapter 2**) revealed that the dominant view of writing is that of a set of practical skills, teachable or acquirable outside the disciplinary context. This contrasts with the view adopted by a subset of the literature reviewed in **Chapter 4**, namely, that writing at doctoral level is primarily a way of joining a disciplinary conversation and of contributing to the knowledge base of a discipline. Through identifying, documenting and analyzing writing support workshops held with students from a range of cognate humanities disciplines (thus positioning itself on



middle ground between the two views referred to above), this thesis heeds both the economies of scale imposed by the current UK landscape of doctoral education and the meaningful integration of writing, disciplinary knowledge and professional identity theorised in a number of studies reviewed in **Chapter 4**.

The conceptualizations of writing and of learning how to write, and the convenor roles I synthesized in **Chapter 7** from my data with the help of the literature consulted for this research help to further researchers' and practitioners' understanding of the complex range of interaction patterns which make up formal writing support at doctoral level. Taking into account the highly contextualised nature of writing support, this thesis makes a threefold contribution to research on writing support. Firstly, it puts forward, in **Chapter 7**, a framework for analyzing formal writing support for humanities doctoral students in the UK, grounded in data filtered through insights from the existing literature. Secondly, I have relied on data from sessions with very different formats to generate a comprehensive range of options for the pedagogic framing of writing support sessions for humanities doctoral students in the UK, options which could successfully be incorporated into a training programme of the kind explored in the postgraduate research pedagogy strand. Lastly, rather than attempt to identify a prescriptive model for formal writing training, my thesis posits that writing support should be flexible enough to meet the differing needs of doctoral students at varied stages in the writing and research process.

### **8.3 Limitations of the study and premises for further research**

One particularly important and insufficiently explored question in the current debate about the nature of the UK doctorate is "In what ways are the development of Graduate Schools, Research Degree Programmes and Research Training Programmes improving the quality of the doctoral student experience?" (Park, 2007, p. 38). My research provides a partial answer to this question. It argues that, in order to arrive at an understanding of the impact of the three institutional and academic structures referred to in the question, additional research must first be carried out into the nature of these structures.

My thesis has looked specifically at a particular type of structure, a research training programme whose pedagogic format emphasised peer interaction. Data collection in my research focused on a year-long training programme and on a number of individual writing support sessions. Inevitably, the time constraints under which full-time doctoral study

operates have pre-empted exploring the impact of the training course and writing support sessions on the completion of individual projects.

In my research I explored teaching and learning as they unfolded in a cross-disciplinary research training setting. Thus, this thesis provides only a partial picture of a research training culture, which was captured mainly through course observation, document analysis and students' response to the training programme, and which reflected the time and institutional constraints on the materialisation of a training culture. The definition of research training cultures in **Chapter 5** also encompassed "convenor and lecturer stated views on doctoral pedagogy". In order to provide a fuller account of a training culture, in-depth interviews with individual session convenors would have been required in the postgraduate research pedagogy strand. Had this research been carried out by a team of researchers, the question could have been approached from several angles. Additionally, the research could have included a number of cases, for comparison purposes. For example, data on Type 1, 2 and 3 research training cultures could have been collected. Alternatively, two Type 3 research training programmes could have been explored in parallel, from pre- and post-1992 universities, or from universities with substantially different numbers of humanities students.

Notwithstanding the time and resource constraints associated with full-time doctoral research, I have been able to put forward in this thesis a number of dimensions on the basis of which to theorise research training and doctoral writing support outside the supervision relationship. My research contributes to the existing research literature on formal research training for doctoral students by being one of the very few studies which systematically explore a training programme in its entirety, which address formal research training from the point of view of the teaching and learning taking place in this context, and which focus specifically on humanities doctoral students. It is putting forward an agenda for research into formal research training and writing support which takes account of both policy initiatives that impact on practice and of actual students' experience of training initiatives. In order to fully understand the impact of policy-driven formal support on thesis production and completion, however, it will be necessary to perform a longitudinal, mixed-methods study which follows the progress of individual doctoral projects from inception to completion. This is all the more important given that the research-based literature reviewed in **Chapters 3 and 4** engages only with specific stages and structures in the doctoral student experience instead of presenting a longitudinal view. It will also be necessary to consider

the interweaving of formal and supervisory support for knowledge-making and writing, an aspect which neither my research nor the literature reviewed in this thesis have addressed.

Case study methodology, on which I have relied in my research, has repeatedly been critiqued for having “limited basis for scientific generalisation” (Yin, 1994, p. 10). My research cannot purport to offer a set of dimensions of a research training programme that can be straightforwardly applied in any higher education institution which offers doctoral research programmes in humanities disciplines. Nevertheless, the research training programme dimensions that this thesis puts forward from the case study analysis come with “details of context and circumstance” (Bassey, 1999, p. 51) that do justice to the complexity and embeddedness of training programmes and that provide a basis for researchers and practitioners to make informed decisions on further research into cross-disciplinary training cultures, and on the design of research training programmes, respectively.

#### **8.4 A final word on formal research training: Skills versus pedagogy**

I completed my research around the same time as a major review of research degree programmes in England and Northern Ireland (QAA, 2007). The review, mostly descriptive and demographic in nature, reflects current training provision and raises important issues to be explored and applied in relation to practice. The review report, based on questionnaires completed by a doctoral training representative in each of the institutions surveyed, found that “institutions are spread out along a spectrum in terms of fully meeting the external expectations” (p. 13). “External expectations” in this quotation refers to the QAA’s *Code of Practice* and to the RCUK Joint Skills Statement. With specific reference to research training programmes and personal development planning, the QAA indicates the following.

While most institutions have now formalised research training programmes, the review teams concluded that many of them could and should be further enhanced to make them more fit for purpose. This applies to the general approach to the development, delivery and monitoring of skills development and provision of training opportunities to research students, in a number of large and small institutions. Specific areas for improvement, scattered between many institutions, include better embedding of skills development within RDPs [research degree programmes], developing more formal and/or compulsory programmes of skills development, better alignment of programmes with the requirements of the RCUK Joint Skills Statement, and making sure that



programmes are appropriate for and accessible to particular groups of students, such as part-time and international distance learning research students. (QAA, 2007, p. 15)

The timeliness and relevance of my research is underwritten by the QAA's call for further enhancement of research training programmes. However, beyond specific guidelines for the design of research training programmes, which could have an immediate impact on practice alongside the QAA recommendations, this thesis promotes, at a theoretical level, a discussion of doctoral pedagogy which takes account of the expectations that research students and training programme convenors bring to the teaching and learning situation, as well as of the key components of relevant policies.

The design and outcomes of my research are embedded in the field of higher education pedagogy. The contribution that this thesis makes to the field can primarily be expressed in terms of refining the concept of research training culture and building on this to explore research training for humanities doctoral students not from the point of view of the suitability of the generic skills agenda but from the point of view of the teaching and learning that occur in a specific research training culture. This thesis has referenced and discussed, in **Chapters 2 and 3**, the limited number of studies which shed light on the research training experience of doctoral students in the UK Humanities. Of these, the large majority reflected the training experience prior to the introduction of the Joint Skills Statement and have so far focused on critiquing the transferable skills agenda and on gauging stakeholders' response to formal training (or, more frequently, the lack thereof). As the formal training sector continues to develop training provision, further research is required to evaluate existing practice and to explore, at a more theoretical level, factors which would potentially enhance the learning of doctoral students from humanities disciplines or other intellectual domains in formal training programmes.

The understanding of pedagogy on which this thesis was built at the research design stage, and which influenced both data analysis and the formulation of conclusions, was one of programme design as a shared responsibility between all stakeholders in the programme. This thesis has shown that at the doctoral level, where the focus is on creating new knowledge rather than accumulating existing one, it becomes all the more important fully to explore the complex range of interaction patterns characteristic of teaching and learning how to do research.

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SOME PARTS  
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